

Grid Colorings that Avoid Rectangles

October 11, 2024

Credit Where Credit is Due

This talk is based on a paper by
Stephen Fenner
William Gasarch
Charles Glover
Semmy Purewal

Ramsey Theory

This talk is an example of Ramsey Theory.

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I will be teaching CMSC 752:

Ramsey Theory and its “Applications”
in the Spring of 2025.

Ramsey Theory

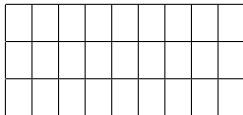
This talk is an example of Ramsey Theory.

I will be teaching CMSC 752:

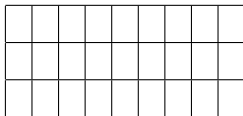
Ramsey Theory and its “Applications”
in the Spring of 2025.

So this talk is an advertisement for the course.

2-Coloring 3×9

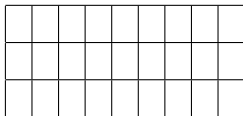


2-Coloring 3×9



Is there a 2-coloring of 3×9 with no mono rectangles?

2-Coloring 3×9



Is there a 2-coloring of 3×9 with no mono rectangles?
What is a mono rectangle? Here is an example:

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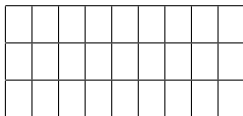
	R					R		
	R					R		

2-Coloring 3×9 : Vote

2-Coloring 3×9 : Vote

Vote

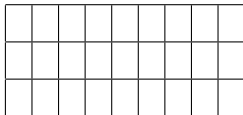
2-Coloring 3×9 : Vote



Vote

1. There is a 2-coloring of 3×9 with NO mono rectangles.

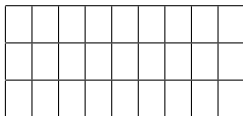
2-Coloring 3×9 : Vote



Vote

1. There is a 2-coloring of 3×9 with NO mono rectangles.
2. All 2-colorings of 3×9 have a mono rectangle.

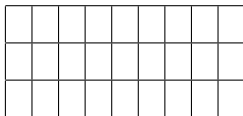
2-Coloring 3×9 : Vote



Vote

1. There is a 2-coloring of 3×9 with NO mono rectangles.
2. All 2-colorings of 3×9 have a mono rectangle.
3. The problem is **UNKNOWN TO SCIENCE**.

2-Coloring 3×9 : Vote



Vote

1. There is a 2-coloring of 3×9 with NO mono rectangles.
2. All 2-colorings of 3×9 have a mono rectangle.
3. The problem is **UNKNOWN TO SCIENCE**.

Answer on the next slide.

All 2-colorings of 3×9 have a mono rectangle

Given a 2-coloring of 3×9 look at each column.

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Each column is either



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Key: A 2-coloring of 3×9 is an 8-coloring of the 9 columns.

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So some column-color appears twice.

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Given a 2-coloring of 3×9 look at each column.

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Key: A 2-coloring of 3×9 is an 8-coloring of the 9 columns.

So some column-color appears twice.

Example:

	R					R		
	B					B		
	R					R		

All 2-colorings of 3×9 have a mono rectangle

Given a 2-coloring of 3×9 look at each column.

Each column is either



Key: A 2-coloring of 3×9 is an 8-coloring of the 9 columns.

So some column-color appears twice.

Example:

	R					R		
	B					B		
	R					R		

Can easily show that the two repeat-columns lead to a mono rectangle.

2-Coloring $3 \times 8, 3 \times 7, \dots$

Work in groups:

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

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1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?

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Work in groups:

1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?
2. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×7 with no mono rectangles?
3. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×6 with no mono rectangles?

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Work in groups:

1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?
2. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×7 with no mono rectangles?
3. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×6 with no mono rectangles?
4. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×5 with no mono rectangles?

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5. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×4 with no mono rectangles?

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4. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×5 with no mono rectangles?
5. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×4 with no mono rectangles?
6. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×3 with no mono rectangles? YES:

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

Work in groups:

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5. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×4 with no mono rectangles?
6. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×3 with no mono rectangles? YES:

Example:

R	B	R
R	B	B
R	R	B


2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

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1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

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NO: to avoid a repeat col must have col  Easily get mono rectangle.

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...



1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?
NO: to avoid a repeat col must have col  Easily get mono rectangle.
2. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×7 with no mono rectangles?

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?

NO: to avoid a repeat col must have col  Easily get mono rectangle.


2. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×7 with no mono rectangles?

NO: to avoid a repeat col must have col  OR 



Easily get mono rectangle.

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?

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3. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×6 with no mono rectangles?

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

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3. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×6 with no mono rectangles?

YES

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?
NO: to avoid a repeat col must have col



Easily get mono rectangle.

2. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×7 with no mono rectangles?
NO: to avoid a repeat col must have col OR



Easily get mono rectangle.

3. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×6 with no mono rectangles?
YES

R	R	R	B	B	B
R	B	B	R	B	R
B	R	B	B	R	R

2-Coloring 3×8 , 3×7 , ...

1. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×8 with no mono rectangles?
NO: to avoid a repeat col must have col



Easily get mono

rectangle.

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Easily get mono rectangle.

3. Is there a 2-coloring of 3×6 with no mono rectangles?
YES

R	R	R	B	B	B
R	B	B	R	B	R
B	R	B	B	R	R

4. Hence there is a 2-coloring of 3×5 , 3×4 , 3×3 with no mono rectangles.

What Do We Know?

$a \times b$ is *2-colorable* if there is a 2-coloring with no mono rectangles.

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- ▶ $2 \times b$ is always 2-colorable
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- ▶ $3 \times b$ where $b \geq 7$ NOT 2-colorable.

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Work on the $4 \times 4, 4 \times 5, 4 \times 6$.

4×6 IS 2-Colorable

R	R	R	B	B	B
R	B	B	R	R	B
B	R	B	R	B	R
B	B	R	B	R	R

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Work on $5 \times 5, 5 \times 6$.

5×5 IS NOT 2-Colorable!

Let COL be a 2-coloring of 5×5 .

5×5 IS NOT 2-Colorable!

Let COL be a 2-coloring of 5×5 .
Some color must occur ≥ 13 times.

Case 1: There is a column with 5 R 's

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R	○	○	○	○
R	○	○	○	○
R	○	○	○	○
R	○	○	○	○
R	○	○	○	○

Remaining columns have ≤ 1 R so

$$\text{Number of } R\text{'s} \leq 5 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 9 < 13.$$

Case 2: There is a column with 4 R 's

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R	○	○	○	○
R	○	○	○	○
R	○	○	○	○
R	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○

Remaining columns have ≤ 2 R 's

$$\text{Number of } R\text{'s} \leq 4 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 \leq 12 < 13$$

Case 3: Max in a column is 3 R 's

Case 3: Max in a column is 3 R 's.

Case 3a: There are ≤ 2 columns with 3 R 's.

Number of R 's $\leq 3 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2 \leq 12 < 13$.

Case 3b: There are ≥ 3 columns with 3 R 's.

R	\circ	\circ	\circ	\circ
R	\circ	\circ	\circ	\circ
R	R	\circ	\circ	\circ
\circ	R	\circ	\circ	\circ
\circ	R	\circ	\circ	\circ

Can't put in a third column with 3 R 's!

Case 4: Max in a column is $\leq 2R$'s

Case 4: Max in a column is $\leq 2R$'s.

Number of R 's $\leq 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 \leq 10 < 13$.

No more cases. We are Done! Q.E.D.

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We now know **exactly** what grids are 2-colorable.

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What we know

- ▶ $2 \times b$ is always 2-colorable
- ▶ 3×3 , 3×4 , 3×5 , 3×6 are all 2-colorable.
- ▶ $3 \times b$ where $b \geq 7$ NOT 2-colorable.
- ▶ 4×4 , 4×5 , 4×6 are 2-colorable
- ▶ $4 \times b$ where $b \geq 7$ NOT 2-colorable.
- ▶ 5×5 , 5×6 NOT 2-colorable.
- ▶ $5 \times b$ where $b \geq 7$ NOT 2-colorable.
- ▶ 6×6 NOT 2-colorable.

We now know **exactly** what grids are 2-colorable.
Can we say it more succinctly?

Obstruction Sets

Def $n \times m$ contains $a \times b$ if $a \leq n$ and $b \leq m$.

Thm For all c there exists a unique finite set of grids OBS_c such that

$n \times m$ is c -colorable **iff**

$n \times m$ does not contain any element of OBS_c .

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1. $\text{OBS}_2 = \{3 \times 7, 7 \times 3, 5 \times 5\}$.
2. Can prove Thm using well-quasi-orderings. No bound on $|\text{OBS}_c|$.

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$n \times m$ is c -colorable **iff**

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1. $\text{OBS}_2 = \{3 \times 7, 7 \times 3, 5 \times 5\}$.
2. Can prove Thm using well-quasi-orderings. No bound on $|\text{OBS}_c|$.
3. We showed $2\sqrt{c}(1 - o(1)) \leq |\text{OBS}_c| \leq 2c^2$.

Research Question

The theorem

$a \times b$ is 2-colorable iff no elements of

$\text{OBS}_2 = \{3 \times 7, 7 \times 3, 5 \times 5\}$ fits into $a \times b$

was proven by cleverness.

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Since 2-coloring has been solved why ask this question?

3-coloring is known. 4-coloring is known. 5-coloring is open!

Main Question

Fix c

What is OBS_c

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Fix c

What is OBS_c

We developed tools to get us both colorings and non-colorings.
They helped us get some of our results, but (alas) too many had to be done ad-hoc.

3-COLORABILITY

We will EXACTLY Characterize which $n \times m$ are 3-colorable!

Easy 3-Colorable Results

Thm

1. The following grids **are not** 3-colorable.

Easy 3-Colorable Results

Thm

1. The following grids **are not** 3-colorable.
 4×19 , 19×4 , 5×16 , 16×5 , 7×13 , 13×7 , 10×12 ,
 12×10 , 11×11 .

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1. The following grids **are not** 3-colorable.
 4×19 , 19×4 , 5×16 , 16×5 , 7×13 , 13×7 , 10×12 ,
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1. The following grids **are not** 3-colorable.
 4×19 , 19×4 , 5×16 , 16×5 , 7×13 , 13×7 , 10×12 ,
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2. The following grids **are** 3-colorable.
 3×19 , 19×3 , 4×18 , 18×4 , 6×15 , 15×6 , 9×12 , 12×9 .

Easy 3-Colorable Results

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1. The following grids **are not** 3-colorable.
 4×19 , 19×4 , 5×16 , 16×5 , 7×13 , 13×7 , 10×12 ,
 12×10 , 11×11 .
2. The following grids **are** 3-colorable.
 3×19 , 19×3 , 4×18 , 18×4 , 6×15 , 15×6 , 9×12 , 12×9 .

Follows from tools.

10×10 is 3-colorable

Thm 10×10 is 3-colorable.

UGLY! TOOLS DID NOT HELP AT ALL!!

R	R	R	R	B	B	G	G	B	G
R	B	B	G	R	R	R	G	G	B
G	R	B	G	R	B	B	R	R	G
G	B	R	B	B	R	G	R	G	R
R	B	G	G	G	B	G	B	R	R
G	R	B	B	G	G	R	B	B	R
B	G	R	B	G	B	R	G	R	B
B	B	G	R	R	G	B	G	B	R
G	G	G	R	B	R	B	B	R	B
B	G	B	R	B	G	R	R	G	G

10×11 is not 3-colorable

Thm 10×11 is not 3-colorable.

You don't want to see this. UGLY case hacking.

Complete Char of 3-colorability

Thm $\text{OBS}_3 =$

$$\{4 \times 19, 5 \times 16, 7 \times 13, 10 \times 11, 11 \times 10, 13 \times 7, 16 \times 5, 19 \times 4\}$$

Complete Char of 3-colorability

Thm $\text{OBS}_3 =$

$$\{4 \times 19, 5 \times 16, 7 \times 13, 10 \times 11, 11 \times 10, 13 \times 7, 16 \times 5, 19 \times 4\}$$

Follows from our tools and the ad-hoc results.

Research Question

The theorem

$a \times b$ is 3-colorable iff no elements of

$\text{OBS}_3 =$

$\{4 \times 19, 5 \times 16, 7 \times 13, 10 \times 11\} \cup$

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fits into $a \times b$

was proven by cleverness.

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Can it be proven by

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3. ChatGPT?

Since 2-coloring has been solved why ask this question?

4-coloring is known. 5-coloring is open!

If the answer is NO then we have found a problem that AI can't do!

4-COLORABILITY

From now on $G_{a,b}$ is $a \times b$.

We will EXACTLY Characterize which $G_{n,m}$ are 4-colorable!

Easy NOT 4-Colorable Results

Thm The following grids **are** NOT 4-colorable:

1. $G_{5,41}$ and $G_{41,5}$
2. $G_{6,31}$ and $G_{31,6}$
3. $G_{7,29}$ and $G_{29,7}$
4. $G_{9,25}$ and $G_{25,9}$
5. $G_{10,23}$ and $G_{23,10}$
6. $G_{11,22}$ and $G_{22,11}$
7. $G_{13,21}$ and $G_{21,13}$
8. $G_{17,20}$ and $G_{20,17}$
9. $G_{18,19}$ and $G_{19,18}$

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5. $G_{10,23}$ and $G_{23,10}$
6. $G_{11,22}$ and $G_{22,11}$
7. $G_{13,21}$ and $G_{21,13}$
8. $G_{17,20}$ and $G_{20,17}$
9. $G_{18,19}$ and $G_{19,18}$

Follows from our tools.

Easy IS 4-Colorable Results

Thm The following grids **are** 4-colorable:

1. $G_{4,41}$ and $G_{41,4}$.
2. $G_{5,40}$ and $G_{40,5}$.
3. $G_{6,30}$ and $G_{30,6}$.
4. $G_{8,28}$ and $G_{28,8}$.
5. $G_{16,20}$ and $G_{20,16}$.

Easy IS 4-Colorable Results

Thm The following grids **are** 4-colorable:

1. $G_{4,41}$ and $G_{41,4}$.
2. $G_{5,40}$ and $G_{40,5}$.
3. $G_{6,30}$ and $G_{30,6}$.
4. $G_{8,28}$ and $G_{28,8}$.
5. $G_{16,20}$ and $G_{20,16}$.

Follows from our tools.

Theorems with UGLY Proofs

Thm

1. $G_{17,19}$ **is** NOT 4-colorable: Some Tools, Some ad-hoc.

Theorems with UGLY Proofs

Thm

1. $G_{17,19}$ **is** NOT 4-colorable: Some Tools, Some ad-hoc.
2. $G_{24,9}$ **is** 4-colorable: Some Tools, Some ad-hoc.

Results about 4-COL So Far in This Talk

Thm

1. The following grids are in OBS_4 :

$G_{5,41}, G_{6,31}, G_{7,29}, G_{9,25}, G_{10,23}, G_{11,22},$
 $G_{22,11}, G_{23,10}, G_{25,9}, G_{29,7}, G_{31,6}, G_{41,5}.$

Results about 4-COL So Far in This Talk

Thm

1. The following grids are in OBS_4 :
 $G_{5,41}, G_{6,31}, G_{7,29}, G_{9,25}, G_{10,23}, G_{11,22},$
 $G_{22,11}, G_{23,10}, G_{25,9}, G_{29,7}, G_{31,6}, G_{41,5}.$
2. The following grids status is unknown:
 $G_{10,22}, G_{12,21}, G_{17,17}, G_{17,18}, G_{18,18},$
 $G_{18,17}, G_{21,21}, G_{22,10}.$

Rectangle Free Conjecture

The following is obvious:

Lemma Let $n, m, c \in \mathbb{N}$. If $G_{n,m}$ is c -colorable then some color occurs $\geq \lceil nm/c \rceil$ times. Hence there is a rectangle free subset of $G_{n,m}$ with $\geq \lceil nm/c \rceil$ elements.

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Rectangle-Free Conjecture (RFC) is the converse:

Let $n, m, c \geq 2$. If there is a rectangle free subset of size of $G_{n,m}$ which is $\geq \lceil nm/c \rceil$ then $G_{n,m}$ is c -colorable.

Rect-Free Subset of $G_{22,10}$ of size $55 = \left\lceil \frac{22 \cdot 10}{4} \right\rceil$

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
1	•						•			
2		•					•			
3			•				•			
4				•			•			
5					•		•			
6						•	•			
7	•	•						•		
8			•	•				•		
9					•	•		•		
10		•	•						•	
11				•	•				•	
12	•					•			•	
13	•			•						•
14		•				•				•
15			•		•					•
16		•			•					
17	•		•							
18				•		•				
19			•			•				
20		•		•						
21	•				•					
22							•	•	•	•

4-coloring of $G_{22,10}$ Due to Brad Loren

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	O	G	R	R	G	G	O	O	B	B
2	G	O	B	G	B	B	O	R	O	R
3	B	G	B	R	O	O	G	R	O	B
4	O	O	G	G	R	R	B	B	G	O
5	O	B	O	O	G	R	R	G	G	R
6	O	B	R	B	R	O	G	R	G	G
7	G	O	G	O	B	O	R	B	R	G
8	O	R	R	B	O	B	G	G	B	R
9	O	B	B	R	R	G	R	G	O	G
10	R	R	B	B	O	G	R	B	G	O
11	R	G	G	O	R	B	B	G	O	R
12	R	B	R	G	G	O	O	B	B	G
13	B	R	G	B	G	R	B	R	O	O
14	G	G	O	B	B	O	R	R	G	B
15	R	G	O	R	B	R	B	O	O	G
16	B	B	O	G	O	B	O	G	R	R
17	G	O	B	R	O	G	B	O	B	R
18	R	B	G	O	B	G	O	R	R	O
19	G	B	R	O	O	R	B	G	R	B
20	B	R	O	G	R	G	G	B	R	O
21	B	R	G	R	B	O	G	O	B	O
22	G	O	O	R	G	B	G	B	R	B

Rect-Free Subset of $G_{21,12}$ of size $63 = \left\lceil \frac{21 \cdot 12}{4} \right\rceil$

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12
1	•	•										
2	•		•									
3		•	•									
4			•	•	•							
5		•		•		•						
6	•				•	•						
7						•	•	•				
8					•		•		•			
9				•				•	•			
10						•				•	•	
11					•					•		•
12				•							•	•
13			•			•			•			•
14			•					•		•		
15			•				•				•	
16		•							•	•		
17		•			•			•			•	
18		•					•					•
19	•								•		•	
20	•							•				•
21	•			•			•			•		

Tom Sirgedas's 4-coloring of 21×12

R	B	B	G	B	R	G	O	O	G	R	G
B	R	B	R	G	B	O	G	O	G	G	R
B	B	R	B	R	G	O	O	G	R	G	G
G	O	B	O	R	R	R	B	O	G	B	O
B	G	O	R	O	R	O	R	B	O	G	B
O	B	G	R	R	O	B	O	R	B	O	G
B	O	R	G	B	O	B	G	G	O	B	R
R	B	O	O	G	B	G	B	G	R	O	B
O	R	B	B	O	G	G	G	B	B	R	O
G	R	R	B	B	R	G	O	R	O	G	O
R	G	R	R	B	B	R	G	O	O	O	G
R	R	G	B	R	B	O	R	G	G	O	O
G	O	O	R	G	B	B	O	B	R	R	G
O	G	O	B	R	G	B	B	O	G	R	R
O	O	G	G	B	R	O	B	B	R	G	R
G	O	B	G	O	G	B	R	R	R	O	B
B	G	O	G	G	O	R	B	R	B	R	O
O	B	G	O	G	G	R	R	B	O	B	R
G	G	R	O	B	O	O	R	G	B	R	B
R	G	G	O	O	B	G	O	R	B	B	R
G	R	G	B	O	O	R	G	O	R	B	B

Rect-Free Subset of $G_{18,18}$ of size $81 = \left\lceil \frac{18 \cdot 18}{4} \right\rceil$

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1		•		•										•		•	•	
2	•	•								•	•		•					
3	•								•						•	•		•
4						•			•			•	•	•				
5		•	•			•												•
6	•			•		•	•											
7							•	•		•				•				•
8			•				•		•		•						•	
9		•			•		•					•			•			
10				•							•	•						•
11	•		•		•									•				
12			•	•				•					•		•			
13				•	•	•		•			•					•		
14	•							•				•					•	
15				•	•				•	•								
16						•				•					•		•	
17			•							•		•				•		
18					•								•				•	•

If RFC is true then $G_{18,18}$ is 4-colorable. NOTE: If delete 2nd column and 5th Row have 74-sized RFC of $G_{17,17}$.

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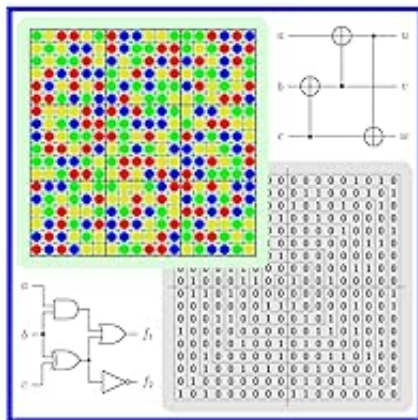
They used a very deep analysis that allowed for a strong reduction of the problem, and then used the Universal SAT-Solver Clasp.

Steinbach & Postoff's 4-Coloring of $G_{18,18}$

R	B	B	R	O	O	O	R	G	R	R	G	O	G	B	G	O	B
G	R	O	O	O	G	G	B	O	R	B	B	R	R	B	G	B	G
B	B	G	G	R	R	O	B	O	B	R	O	R	G	O	O	R	G
R	R	G	B	O	G	R	B	R	O	O	G	B	O	G	O	R	B
B	O	B	G	G	O	G	G	O	R	B	G	B	O	R	B	R	R
G	O	O	R	R	B	B	B	R	O	G	G	G	R	O	B	O	R
B	R	G	B	B	B	G	O	G	G	R	O	G	O	B	R	O	R
O	R	O	G	R	B	O	R	B	B	B	R	G	O	G	G	G	B
O	O	R	G	O	G	B	R	B	G	G	O	B	R	B	R	R	O
B	G	G	O	G	O	B	R	R	O	G	O	R	B	R	G	B	B
O	R	R	R	B	R	G	O	O	O	G	B	O	G	R	B	G	B
G	B	G	O	B	R	B	G	R	R	B	R	O	O	O	R	G	O
G	B	O	B	G	R	R	R	B	G	O	O	O	G	G	B	B	R
G	G	O	G	B	O	R	O	G	B	R	R	B	R	R	O	B	O
O	G	B	R	B	O	R	B	B	G	O	G	R	B	O	R	G	G
R	G	B	B	R	G	B	G	O	B	O	B	G	G	R	R	O	O
R	O	R	O	G	G	O	O	G	B	O	R	R	B	B	B	G	R
O	B	R	O	R	B	R	G	G	R	G	B	B	B	G	O	O	G

The 4-Coloring of 18×18 on Cover of a Book Edited by Steinbach

Recent Progress in the Boolean Domain



OBS₄ IS

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The usual **Research Question**: Can we get OBS₄ with AI?

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If you want to see the proof that for all c , $N(c)$ exists then

Take CMSC 752 in Spring 2025

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5. Unleash AI on these problems!