

---

# Who is a mathematician ?

S. Parthasarathy  
drpartha@gmail.com

---

Ref: mathpeoplemw.tex  
Version: 20220121c

The term “mathematician” is a gender-neutral word. In this essay, we try to find gender-specific terms to provide clarity on whether we are speaking about a woman or a man. This bifurcation may be useful and necessary in certain narrations involving mathematicians.

## 1 Who is a mathematician ?

This is an unusually difficult and controversial question to answer. According to Wikipedia [1] :

*“A mathematician is someone who uses an extensive knowledge of mathematics in his or her work, typically to solve mathematical problems. ”*

The phrase “solve mathematical problems” may be explained as the effort of tackling a problem that is amenable to being represented, analyzed, and possibly solved, with the methods of mathematics.

The term “solve” may include, contributions to :

1. Creating or deriving a new result, concept, relationship or theorem.
2. Formally proving (or confirming) an existing theorem, conjecture, hypothesis, relationship or identity.
3. Formally disproving an existing proof.
4. Formulating a mathematical problem or mathematical model.
5. Answering specific questions related to a mathematical model.

## 1.1 Gender-based classification

Notice that the above is a gender-neutral definition of a mathematician (notice the use of “his or her”). In some situations, we would require a gender-specific classification of mathematicians. We provide below, two gender-specific classifications : mmathematician, wathematician. In cases, where it is not necessary to use a gender-specific term, we can continue to use the classic term called mathematician.

The French have a more natural way of making the distinction, Their language helps them. The usual masculine and feminine forms are:

- mathématicien (un mathématicien)
- mathématicienne (une mathématicienne)

France has produced so many great mathematicians that there are nearly a 100 Parisian streets, squares, boulevards etc. named after mathematicians [4].

For English-speaking audiences, a gender-specific classification of “mathematician” is given below.

mmathematician : a male mathematician

wathematician : a woman mathematician

The generic term “mathematician” may be used when the restrictive terms “mmathematician” and “wathematician” are not absolutely necessary. This way, we retain the original identity of the classic term “mathematician”.

In [2] and [3] we give examples of some mmathematicians and some wathematicians respectively.

## 2 Who is a mathematics vagabond ?

And then there are people who have a genuine love, interest and admiration for mathematics and all that is mathematical. They seem to know a lot about mathematics. This is the type who pretends to know mathematics, just waves his (her) hands and talks endlessly whenever he (she) sermonises on mathematics. You can also call him (her) a *mathematics vagabond*.<sup>1</sup> In this case, since the gender does not matter much, we can use the term – *vathematician*

---

<sup>1</sup><https://drpartha.org.in/wp/2021/10/11/13-2021-flavours-of-mathematicians/>

To borrow a religious metaphor, he (she) is an evangelist who implores all to follow his (her) GOD, mathematics. Whether you care for what he (she) says, or disagree with him (her), he (she) does not mind either way.

### 3 Closing remarks

The question asked in the title is still not answered, as long as we do not know the answer for “What is mathematics ? ”. That will ignite a more philosophical and even controversial debate. Readers of this article can send their ideas and suggestions to the author (by email).

This article was created by the author, using L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X . The L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X source of this article can be obtained by sending a request to : [drpartha@gmail.com](mailto:drpartha@gmail.com). Please mention the Ref. No., and the Vers. code mentioned at the top of this article. As always, your constructive suggestions and remarks are always welcome.

### References

- [1] Mathematician,  
<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Mathematician>
- [2] Who is this mathematician ?  
<http://drpartha.org.in/publications/mathpeople-m.pdf>
- [3] Who is this mathematician ?  
<http://drpartha.org.in/publications/mathpeople-w.pdf>
- [4] Mathematicians with Paris streets named after them  
<https://mathshistory.st-andrews.ac.uk/Honours/ParisNames/>

\*\*\*