

Activity: Sampling from *The Federalist Papers*

The Federalist Papers are a series of 85 essays supporting the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. At the time they were published, the identity of the authors was a secret known to just a few people. Over time, however, the authors were identified as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. The authorship of 73 of the essays is fairly certain, leaving 12 in dispute. However, thanks in some part to statistical analysis¹, most scholars now believe that the 12 disputed essays were written by Madison alone or in collaboration with Hamilton².

There are several ways to use statistics to help determine the authorship of a disputed text. One method is to estimate the average word length in a disputed text and compare it to the average word lengths of works where the authorship is not in dispute.

Directions: The following passage is the opening paragraph of *Federalist Paper #51*³, one of the disputed essays. The theme of this essay is the separation of powers between the three branches of government. Choose 5 words from this passage, count the number of letters in each of the words you selected, and find the average word length. Share your estimate with the class and create a class dotplot.

To what expedient, then, shall we finally resort, for maintaining in practice the necessary partition of power among the several departments, as laid down in the Constitution? The only answer that can be given is, that as all these exterior provisions are found to be inadequate, the defect must be supplied, by so contriving the interior structure of the government as that its several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places. Without presuming to undertake a full development of this important idea, I will hazard a few general observations, which may perhaps place it in a clearer light, and enable us to form a more correct judgment of the principles and structure of the government planned by the convention.

¹ Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace. *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist*. Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1964.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_papers

³ <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm>

Directions: Use a table of random digits or a random number generator to select a simple random sample (SRS) of 5 words from the opening passage of the *Federalist Paper #51*. Once you have chosen the words, count the number of letters in each of the words you selected and find the average word length. Share your estimate with the class and create a class dotplot. How does this dotplot compare to the first one? Can you think of any reasons why they might be different?

Number	Word	Number	Word	Number	Word
1	To	44	To	87	A
2	What	45	Be	88	Full
3	Expedient	46	Inadequate	89	Development
4	Then	47	The	90	Of
5	Shall	48	Defect	91	This
6	We	49	Must	92	Important
7	Finally	50	Be	93	Idea
8	Resort	51	Supplied	94	I
9	For	52	By	95	Will
10	Maintaining	53	So	96	Hazard
11	In	54	Contriving	97	A
12	Practice	55	The	98	Few
13	The	56	Interior	99	General
14	Necessary	57	Structure	100	Observations
15	Partition	58	Of	101	Which
16	Of	59	The	102	May
17	Power	60	Government	103	Perhaps
18	Among	61	As	104	Place
19	The	62	That	105	It
20	Several	63	Its	106	In
21	Departments	64	Several	107	A
22	As	65	Constituent	108	Clearer
23	Laid	66	Parts	109	Light
24	Down	67	May	110	And
25	In	68	By	111	Enable
26	The	69	Their	112	Us
27	Constitution	70	Mutual	113	To
28	The	71	Relations	114	Form
29	Only	72	Be	115	A
30	Answer	73	The	116	More
31	That	74	Means	117	Correct
32	Can	75	Of	118	Judgment
33	Be	76	Keeping	119	Of
34	Given	77	Each	120	The
35	Is	78	Other	121	Principles
36	That	79	In	122	And
37	As	80	Their	123	Structure
38	All	81	Proper	124	Of
39	These	82	Places	125	The
40	Exterior	83	Without	126	Government
41	Provisions	84	Presuming	127	Planned
42	Are	85	To	128	By
43	Found	86	Undertake	129	The
				130	Convention