

Understanding English Grammar
Linguistic Problem of the Month, April 2011
An Italian Borrowing

English has borrowed many words from other languages. This logic problem hinges on a key English word that was borrowed from Italian. Yes, you can solve this problem even if you don't know any Italian!

The following are three multiplication equations in Italian:

$$\text{tre} \times \text{tre} = \text{nove}$$

$$\text{cinque} \times \text{cinque} = \text{venticinque}$$

$$\text{sette} \times \text{sette} = \text{quarantanove}$$

Problem: For how many days were ships detained by the authorities in Italian ports in the 14th century if they had arrived from plague-stricken regions?