

Problem B3 on the 2002 Putnam Competition reads:

Show that, for $n > 1$,

$$\frac{1}{2ne} < \frac{1}{e} - \left(1 - \frac{1}{n}\right)^n < \frac{1}{ne}.$$

The most popular solution among contestants who solved the problem was neither the one published in *Mathematics Magazine* (February 2003) nor the one in the *American Mathematical Monthly* (October 2003), but rather the following:

$$\begin{array}{l} \frac{1}{2ne} < \frac{1}{e} - \left(1 - \frac{1}{n}\right)^n < \frac{1}{ne} \\ \Leftrightarrow \text{rearrange} \quad \frac{1}{e}\left(1 - \frac{1}{2n}\right) > \left(1 - \frac{1}{n}\right)^n > \frac{1}{e}\left(1 - \frac{1}{n}\right) \\ \Leftrightarrow \text{multiply by } e \quad 1 - \frac{1}{2n} > e\left(1 - \frac{1}{n}\right)^n > 1 - \frac{1}{n} \\ \Leftrightarrow \text{take logs} \quad \log\left(1 - \frac{1}{2n}\right) > 1 + n \log\left(1 - \frac{1}{n}\right) > \log\left(1 - \frac{1}{n}\right) \\ \Leftrightarrow \text{Maclaurin series} \quad \sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{1}{k(2n)^k} < n \sum_{k \geq 2} \frac{1}{kn^k} < \sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{1}{kn^k} \\ \Leftrightarrow \text{collect terms} \quad \sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{1}{k2^k} \frac{1}{n^k} < \sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{1}{k+1} \frac{1}{n^k} < \sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{1}{k} \frac{1}{n^k}. \end{array}$$

The last line holds since $\frac{1}{k2^k} \leq \frac{1}{k+1} < \frac{1}{k}$ for $k \geq 1$ (comparing coefficients of $\frac{1}{n^k}$).