

## Problem of the Week

May 26, 2010

### Word Circles

It is hard to define things. Well, maybe not concrete things like “pencils” or “shoes”, but abstract things, like “time” and “space”.

Case in point: In reading possible Science books for next year, I came across the following definition of Matter.

***Matter** is anything that takes up space and has mass. Mass is the amount of matter in an object.*

I thought this might be a problem with this particular book, so I checked the OED. Quoting, in part, we start with:

***Matter:** the substance, or the substances collectively, out of which a physical substance is made or of which it consists.*

Well, ok...but what is a “physical” substance? Is there another kind of substance? Let’s look up “physical”:

***Physical:** pertaining to, or connected with matter.*

You see the problem. One abstract word leads to another and then another until you get back where you started.

Problem: both of these are very short circles (word A leads to word B which leads back to word A). Can you find longer ones? Specifically, using the OED, find a circle which is at least 4 or 5 words long. How long a loop can you find?