



Beginning with this issue, we present *VIEWPOINT*, where we re-examine familiar mathematics concepts and practices through different viewpoints. We encourage you to write in with your thoughts on the viewpoints expressed here. Send in your mail to AtRiA.editor@apu.edu.in.

A Word and an Idea

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It may be a truism to say that a word can make or mar matters. New words are constantly coming into vogue while some go into disuse. I want to highlight a word that could make life a bit simpler for math teachers and learners. When I first joined an Anglo-Indian school about six decades ago there were no sharp divisions between subjects. In one craft/math class we students cut out 2D shapes from coloured paper and stuck them in scrap books, besides naming objects around us that resembled those shapes. The first shape we learnt was the square, a figure with four equal sides and similar-looking corners. The next was the ‘oblong’ – a four-sided figure with opposite pairs of sides equal but one set longer than the other, and with all corners appearing similar. (We did not know about right angles then.) We could find plenty of objects around of that shape – table top, door frame, window frame, book, etc. - many more than we could for the square. It was after a few years that I encountered the word ‘rectangle’ – introduced as a figure with four right angles, which could be a square or an oblong shape. I was seldom troubled by the existential question ‘Is the square a rectangle?’

So, as a math teacher of three decades, and reflecting on my own student days, I urge all math educators at primary level to help resurrect this word ‘oblong’ and use it up to class 3 or 4 (to stand for a non-square rectangle). The word rectangle could be introduced at class 5 level. This should help clear the air considerably.

Keywords: Viewpoint, opinion, sharing, pedagogy, vocabulary, quadrilateral, classification