

# On the support size of 3-designs with repeated blocks

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**Abstract.** The set of all distinct blocks of a  $t - (v, k)$  design is referred to as the support of the design, and its cardinality is denoted by  $b^*$ . By generalizing a method on BIB designs called "trade off" to 3-designs, a table for  $3 - (9, 4)$  designs with each  $60 \leq b^* \leq 126 = \binom{9}{4}$  is constructed. Also we have produced over 2500 non-isomorphic  $3 - (9, 4)$  designs with  $\lambda_3 = 6$ . By utilizing this generalized trade off method along with two other methods, a table for  $3 - (10, 4)$  designs with 156 different  $b^*$ 's is constructed. By a recursive lower bound on the minimum value of  $b^*$  in all  $t - (v, k)$  designs, it is shown that  $b_{\min}^*[3 - (9, 4)] \geq 36$ , and  $b_{\min}^*[3 - (10, 4)] = 30$ .

## Introduction

Let  $V = \{1, 2, \dots, v\}$  and let  $v \sum k$  be the collection of all distinct subsets of  $V$  of size  $k$ . A  $t$ -design (or more specifically a  $t - (v, k)$  design) with parameters  $v, k$  and  $\lambda$  is a collection of  $b$ , not necessarily distinct, elements of  $v \sum k$ , referred to as blocks, with the property that every element of  $v \sum t$  occurs in exactly  $\lambda$  blocks. The number of distinct blocks of a  $t$ -design is called the *support size* of the design and is denoted by  $b^*$ .

A  $(v, k, t)$  trade or simply a  $t$ -trade of volume  $s$  consists of two disjoint collections  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ , each of  $s$  blocks, such that for every element of  $v \sum t$ , the number of blocks containing this element is the same in both  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ .

For a given set of parameters  $v, k$  and  $t$ , it is an open question to determine possible support sizes of all  $t - (v, k)$  designs. See for example [6] page 278. There are several papers in the literature which deal with this question for the cases of  $t = 2$  (BIB designs). Here we apply three methods that have been used for BIBD's, to  $3 - (9, 4)$  and  $3 - (10, 4)$  designs. It can easily be seen that there is no nontrivial  $3 - (9, 4)$  design whose blocks are all distinct. (A design is *trivial* if  $v \sum k$  constitutes its blocks.) On the other hand it is known that there exists a nontrivial  $3 - (10, 4)$  design whose blocks are all distinct. In fact, there exists a  $3 - (10, 4)$  design with  $b = 30$ .

The only other nontrivial case for 3-designs with  $v \leq 10$  is  $3 - (8, 4)$  designs, which are studied in [10]. The rest of this section will be devoted to the discussion of the methods used to construct  $3 - (9, 4)$  and  $3 - (10, 4)$  designs.

First, the elementary *method of composition*, in which we consider the union of the collections of the blocks of two given  $t$ -designs to produce a new  $t$ -design, with a possible different  $b^*$ . Second, the *method of reducing support size*, which

is discussed in [7] and a computer algorithm is given there. Third, the *method of t-trade off* which is discussed in [3] and is applied to BIB designs with  $v = 8$  and  $k = 4$ . This method can easily be generalized for  $t$ -designs.

For  $v$ ,  $k$  and  $t$ , consider the following polynomial

$$(x_1 - x_2)(x_3 - x_4) \dots (x_{2t+1} - x_{2t+2})x_{2t+3} \dots x_{k+t+1}.$$

If we multiply the factors, and identify each  $x_i$  with  $i$ , the  $i^{\text{th}}$  element in  $V$ , then the resulting expression forms a  $(v, k, t)$  trade. For example, in the case of  $t = 2$  and  $k = 4$  we obtain the following set of blocks:

$$\begin{array}{l} T_1 : \quad 1357 \quad 1467 \quad 2367 \quad 2457 \\ T_2 : \quad 2467 \quad 2357 \quad 1457 \quad 1367 \end{array}$$

By applying certain permutations on this  $(v, k, t)$  trade, Graham, Li, and Li [1] have obtained a basis for the space of  $(v, k, t)$  trades.

In  $t$ -trade off method, for a given  $t$ -design, we construct a  $t$ -trade in such a way that either the blocks in  $T_1$  or the blocks in  $T_2$  are in the given design. Then by replacing the blocks of  $T_1$  (or  $T_2$ ) by the blocks of  $T_2$  (or  $T_1$ , respectively) in the given design, we obtain another design with possibly different  $b^*$ . Based on this idea we have utilized a computer algorithm for 3-trade off method.

### Minimum support size

For each set of parameters  $v$ ,  $k$ , and  $t$ , it is also an open question to determine  $b_{\min}^*$ , the minimum possible value of the support sizes of  $t - (v, k)$  designs. For some special values of  $v$ ,  $k$ , and  $t$ , this question has been answered. The value  $\binom{v}{t}$  is settled for the upper bound of  $b_{\min}^*$ . But as is mentioned in [6, page 278], for almost all  $v$ ,  $k$ , and  $t$ , the actual value is far below  $\binom{v}{t}$ . In [6] the “hard” case of  $v = 8$ ,  $k = 3$ , and  $t = 2$  is mentioned for an evidence of this fact, in which there is no nontrivial design without repeated block. The case  $v = 9$ ,  $k = 4$  and  $t = 3$  is another “hard” case, and as it is demonstrated in Table 1,  $b_{\min}^* \leq 60$ , which is again far below  $\binom{9}{3} = 84$ .

Next we prove a lemma which gives a recursive bound for  $b_{\min}^*$ .

**Lemma.** *Let  $b_{\min}^*[t - (k, v)]$  be the minimum possible value of the support sizes of all  $t - (k, v)$  designs. Then*

$$b_{\min}^*[(t-1) - (v-1, k-1)] + b_{\min}^*[(t-1) - (v-1, k)] \leq b_{\min}^*[t - (v, k)]$$

**Proof:** Suppose  $D$  is a  $t - (v, k)$  design based on the set  $V$  with support size  $b^*[t - (v, k)]$ . We denote the collection of blocks of  $D$  by  $\mathcal{B}(D)$ . With respect

to any element  $x \in V$ , we may obtain from  $D$ , the following  $(t - 1)$ -designs  $D_1$  and  $D_2$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{B}(D_1) &= \{B \mid B \in \mathcal{B}(D) \text{ and } x \notin B\}, \\ \mathcal{B}(D_2) &= \{B - \{x\} \mid B \in \mathcal{B}(D) \text{ and } x \in B\}. \end{aligned}$$

Then  $D_1$  is a  $(t - 1) - (v - 1, k)$  design, while  $D_2$  is a  $(t - 1) - (v - 1, k - 1)$  design. The support size of  $D$  is equal to the sum of the support sizes of  $D_1$  and  $D_2$ . This implies the statement of the lemma.

**Corollary 1.**  $b_{\min}^*[3 - (9, 4)] \geq 36$ .

Proof: It follows from the previous lemma and the fact that  $b_{\min}^*[2 - (8, 4)] = 14$  (see [3]), and  $b_{\min}^*[2 - (8, 3)] = 22$  (see [4]).

**Corollary 2.**  $b_{\min}^*[3 - (10, 4)] = 30$ .

Proof: We have  $b_{\min}^*[2 - (9, 3)] = 12$  (see for example [9]), and  $b_{\min}^*[2 - (9, 4)] = 18$  (see [8]). Therefore the statement follows by the above lemma and the fact that a  $3 - (10, 4)$  design with  $b^* = 30$  (a Steiner system  $S(3, 4, 10)$ ) exists (see Table 2).

### 3 - (9, 4) designs

Let  $D$  be a  $t - (v, k)$  design based on the set of elements  $V$ . It is well known that for each  $s$  ( $1 \leq s \leq t$ ), every element of  $v$   $\sum$   $s$  occurs in the same number of blocks. We denote this number by  $\lambda_s$ , and let  $\lambda_0 = b$  and  $\lambda_t = \lambda$ . By an elementary counting argument we have,

$$\lambda_s = \lambda \frac{\binom{v-s}{t-s}}{\binom{k-s}{t-s}} \quad 0 \leq s \leq t. \tag{1}$$

Therefore, for the existence of a  $t - (v, k)$  design with parameter  $\lambda$ , the basic necessary conditions are that, for each  $s$ , the value  $\lambda_s$  given in (1) be an integer. Thus, for  $3 - (9, 4)$  designs, the minimum possible value for  $\lambda_s$  is 6, and the minimum number of blocks is  $\binom{9}{4} = 126$ . By applying the method of 3-trade off on trivial design we have obtained all  $3 - (9, 4)$  designs with  $60 \leq b^* \leq 126$  and  $b = 126$ , except for  $B^* \in A \cup B$ , where  $A = \{117, 119, 120, \dots, 125\}$  and  $B = \{113, 115, 116\}$ . The designs with  $b = 126$  and  $b^* \in A$  do not exist because it is proven that there exists no  $(v, k, t)$  trade with volume equal to  $1, 2, \dots, 2^t - 1$ , and  $2^t + 1$  (see [5]). In Table 1 we have constructed designs with  $b = 2(126) = 252$  for each  $b^* \in A \cup B$ .

As the designs in Table 1 indicate,  $3 - (9, 4)$  designs exist for each  $60 \leq b^* \leq 126$ , whose number of blocks  $b$ , is given in the table. Besides this, all  $3 - (9, 4)$  designs with  $60 \leq b^* \leq 126$  exist for any possible  $b > 126$ . For,

if  $60 \leq b^* \leq 126$  and  $b^* \notin A \cup B$ , then one may take  $l$  copies of the design listed in Table 1 with the given  $b^*$ , and obtain a design with  $b = 126l$ . If a design with  $b^* \in A \cup B$  and with a larger  $b$  is desired, then one note that the design with  $b^* = 61$  is embedded in the designs with  $b^* \in A \cup B$  in Table 1. Thus by adding copies of this subdesign to the design with desired  $b^*$ , one can increase the number of blocks without altering the support size. We should mention that how the designs can be reconstructed from the entries in Table 1. The first four lines list the blocks vertically, in lexicographical order. And that  $x$  in the column beneath the block indicates that that block occurs  $x$  times in the design, i.e. the frequency of that block. Each design with a given  $b$  and  $b^*$  is listed in a row, with its block frequencies.

Note: With a long search by the 3-trade off method and the method of reducing support sizes of designs, we were unable to find designs with  $b^* \in B$  and  $b = 126$ . A similar result was observed in the case of  $3 - (10, 4)$  designs. This fact indicates that there might not be any 3-trade of volume 10, 11, or 13. This conjecture is under investigation.

The method of  $t$ -trade off is very useful in constructing non-isomorphic designs. Utilizing this method, by a computer program, we have obtained over 2500 non-isomorphic  $3 - (9, 4)$  designs with  $\lambda_3 = 6$  (see [12]). The previous known lower bound on this was 50 (see [2]).

### 3 - (10, 4) designs

In [11], it is shown that there exist five mutually disjoint  $S(3, 4, 10)$ , i.e.  $3 - (10, 4)$  designs with  $\lambda_3 = 1$  ( $b = 30$ ).

In Table 2, we have demonstrated the result. In this Table first we introduce an  $S(3, 4, 10)$ . Then we present all the designs which may be found by composition. There, we list the value of  $b$  and  $b^*$  for the desired design, then  $b^*$  of a design  $D$ , followed by the image of a permutation on ten elements. If we apply this permutation on the design whose  $b^*$  is given in the last column and consider the collection of blocks of the resulting design together with the blocks of  $D$ , we obtain the desired design.

In the last part of Table 2, we list all the designs which are found by  $t$ -trade off method. In this part we list the value of  $b$  and  $b^*$  of the desired design, then the support size of a design  $D$ , that can be traded to obtain the desired design. Needed trade is introduced in the polynomial notation. The list of all  $3 - (10, 4)$  designs is available from the author.

Note: With a long search by computer, we were not able to find  $3 - (10, 4)$  designs with  $b^* \in C \cup E$ , where  $C = \{31, \dots, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59\}$  and  $E = \{61, 63\}$ . This raises an interesting question: Following [13] we denote,

$J(v) = \{k \mid \text{there exists a pair of } 3 - (v, 4) \text{ designs with } \lambda_3 = 1, \text{ having exactly } k \text{ quadruples in common}\}$  and





Table 2

A 3-design with  $v = 10, k = 4$

111111111111122222222233333444456  
 222233344556333445584455756767  
 346746958787467566795668878998  
 5A9878A699AA8A9978AAA979A8AAA9

$B^*$	$B$	111111111111111111111111111111111111
30	30	

3-designs with  $v = 10, k = 4$

$B$	$B^*$	$= B^*$	$+$	Permutation										on	$B^*$
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A		
60	46	30		3	9	A	4	1	6	7	2	8	5	30	
60	48	30		6	1	2	7	5	4	8	9	3	A	30	
60	52	30		2	6	5	4	9	7	1	8	3	A	30	
60	54	30		2	5	6	A	9	7	3	4	1	8	30	
60	56	30		5	4	2	8	7	9	6	3	1	A	30	
60	58	30		4	A	9	2	6	5	7	1	8	3	30	
60	60	30		2	6	5	4	1	7	3	8	9	A	30	
90	62	30		3	1	9	6	5	7	A	2	4	8	46	
90	64	30		4	7	3	8	5	2	A	1	6	9	48	
90	65	30		4	6	3	1	8	7	2	9	A	5	46	
90	66	30		8	4	1	3	9	A	7	2	5	6	46	
90	67	30		7	1	9	4	3	2	6	8	5	A	46	
90	68	30		8	4	A	2	5	7	6	3	1	9	46	
90	71	30		9	3	8	2	1	7	5	4	6	A	46	
90	73	30		1	2	9	6	5	A	4	7	3	8	46	
90	77	30		A	2	5	8	1	7	9	3	4	6	58	
120	89	30		2	1	7	3	9	8	4	A	5	6	64	
90	90	60		3	7	5	6	4	1	2	8	9	A	30	
120	120	90		7	1	6	2	5	4	3	8	9	A	30	
150	150	120		1	4	5	3	7	2	6	8	9	A	30	
150	123	30		3	6	1	5	9	8	4	A	7	2	100	
240	203	30		7	1	9	4	3	2	6	8	5	A	202	
240	204	30		4	2	5	3	7	1	8	A	9	6	202	
270	208	60		4	2	5	3	7	1	8	A	9	6	202	

3-designs with  $v = 10, k = 4$

$B$	$B^* = D + T$	$B$	$B^* = D + T$
90 69	70 (1-6)(2-3)(5-A)(7-9)	90 70	72 (1-3)(2-8)(5-7)(9-A)
90 72	76 (3-8)(4-6)(5-9)(A-7)	90 74	76 (1-3)(2-8)(5-7)(9-A)
90 75	76 (1-4)(2-8)(3-A)(5-6)	90 76	81 (1-6)(2-3)(4-9)(8-7)
90 78	81 (1-6)(2-3)(4-5)(A-7)	90 79	81 (1-4)(2-8)(3-A)(5-6)
90 80	81 (1-9)(2-8)(3-7)(4-6)	90 81	85 (1-9)(2-7)(4-A)(8-5)
90 82	85 (1-4)(2-8)(3-A)(5-6)	90 83	85 (1-A)(2-8)(4-9)(7-5)
90 84	88 (1-A)(2-5)(3-9)(7-6)	90 85	88 (1-8)(2-4)(3-5)(6-A)
90 86	88 (1-4)(2-8)(3-6)(5-A)	90 87	85 (1-6)(2-3)(5-9)(8-A)
90 88	90 (1-5)(2-A)(3-7)(6-9)	120 91	92 (1-3)(2-A)(4-8)(5-7)
120 92	93 (1-4)(2-9)(3-7)(6-A)	120 93	96 (1-6)(2-5)(3-9)(A-8)
120 94	93 (1-7)(2-4)(3-5)(8-A)	120 95	93 (1-9)(2-8)(3-6)(5-A)
120 96	97 (1-9)(2-A)(3-6)(8-5)	120 97	100 (1-6)(2-7)(3-9)(5-4)
120 98	97 (1-7)(2-4)(3-6)(8-5)	120 99	97 (1-A)(2-9)(3-8)(6-5)
120 100	101 (1-6)(2-8)(3-9)(4-A)	120 101	102 (1-8)(2-6)(3-4)(A-9)
120 102	103 (1-4)(2-7)(3-8)(A-5)	120 103	104 (1-9)(2-5)(3-6)(A-7)
120 104	109 (1-A)(2-8)(3-7)(5-4)	120 105	104 (1-8)(2-A)(3-4)(7-5)
120 106	103 (1-8)(2-A)(3-4)(7-5)	120 107	104 (1-7)(2-4)(3-6)(8-5)
120 108	104 (1-8)(2-6)(3-4)(A-5)	120 109	110 (1-9)(2-A)(3-5)(4-7)
120 110	111 (1-A)(2-9)(3-6)(7-5)	120 111	114 (1-8)(2-6)(3-4)(5-A)
120 112	113 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(6-9)	120 113	118 (1-5)(2-9)(3-8)(6-A)
120 114	118 (1-4)(2-5)(3-A)(7-6)	120 115	118 (1-4)(2-8)(3-6)(7-A)
120 116	118 (1-5)(2-A)(3-7)(4-9)	120 117	118 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(6-9)
120 118	120 (1-7)(2-A)(3-5)(6-4)	120 119	118 (1-A)(2-9)(4-8)(6-5)
150 121	122 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(9-5)	150 122	123 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(5-A)
150 124	123 (1-7)(2-5)(3-8)(6-A)	150 125	123 (1-9)(2-A)(3-4)(8-6)
150 126	123 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(5-6)	150 127	128 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(5-A)
150 128	123 (1-9)(2-7)(3-4)(8-6)	150 129	128 (1-7)(2-5)(3-8)(6-A)
150 130	128 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(5-6)	150 131	132 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(5-A)
150 132	128 (1-5)(2-4)(3-A)(9-6)	150 133	132 (1-5)(2-7)(3-6)(8-A)
150 134	132 (1-8)(2-6)(3-7)(5-A)	150 135	132 (1-5)(2-6)(4-9)(7-8)
150 136	132 (1-8)(2-6)(5-A)(9-7)	150 137	142 (1-8)(2-7)(3-9)(5-6)
150 138	142 (1-8)(2-6)(3-4)(5-9)	150 139	142 (1-8)(2-6)(3-4)(5-A)
150 140	145 (1-8)(2-6)(3-4)(5-A)	150 141	146 (1-8)(2-6)(3-4)(5-9)
150 142	146 (1-7)(2-A)(3-4)(6-5)	150 143	146 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(A-5)
150 144	150 (1-8)(2-A)(3-6)(5-4)	150 145	146 (1-8)(2-4)(3-7)(6-5)
150 146	150 (1-9)(2-8)(3-6)(5-4)	150 147	149 (1-5)(2-9)(3-7)(4-6)
150 148	150 (1-A)(2-9)(3-6)(7-4)	150 149	148 (1-4)(2-A)(3-5)(6-7)
180 151	157 (1-8)(2-4)(3-9)(A-5)	180 152	157 (1-9)(2-6)(3-4)(5-8)
180 153	157 (1-4)(2-6)(3-7)(9-5)	180 154	157 (1-9)(2-A)(3-6)(4-5)
180 155	157 (1-7)(2-A)(3-6)(4-5)	180 156	157 (1-7)(2-9)(3-6)(4-5)
180 157	165 (1-6)(2-A)(3-8)(5-7)	180 158	165 (1-8)(2-6)(3-9)(5-7)
180 159	165 (1-9)(2-A)(3-4)(5-7)	180 160	165 (1-9)(2-6)(3-4)(5-8)
180 161	165 (1-9)(2-A)(3-6)(4-5)	180 162	165 (1-7)(2-A)(3-6)(4-5)
180 163	165 (1-6)(2-8)(3-7)(4-5)	180 164	165 (1-7)(2-9)(3-6)(4-5)
180 165	173 (1-7)(2-9)(3-A)(5-6)	180 166	173 (1-7)(2-6)(3-4)(5-8)
180 167	173 (1-9)(2-6)(3-4)(5-7)	180 168	174 (1-9)(2-A)(3-4)(5-6)



3-designs with  $v = 10, k = 4$

$B$	$B^* = D + T$
180 169	174 (1-7)(2-9)(3-4)(6-5)
180 171	176 (1-7)(2-9)(3-4)(6-5)
180 173	176 (1-8)(2-7)(3-4)(9-5)
210 175	179 (1-9)(2-6)(3-8)(5-4)
210 177	182 (1-7)(2-9)(3-8)(5-6)
210 179	182 (1-9)(2-6)(3-7)(4-5)
210 182	186 (1-A)(2-6)(3-4)(5-9)
210 184	190 (1-9)(2-5)(3-7)(6-4)
210 186	194 (1-8)(2-A)(3-5)(6-4)
210 188	194 (1-9)(2-7)(3-6)(5-4)
210 190	194 (1-7)(2-9)(3-5)(4-6)
210 192	198 (1-9)(2-7)(3-5)(4-6)
210 194	195 (1-A)(2-7)(3-6)(4-5)
210 196	198 (1-7)(2-9)(3-5)(6-4)
210 198	202 (1-7)(2-9)(3-6)(4-5)
240 200	203 (1-8)(2-7)(3-5)(4-6)
210 202	210 (1-8)(2-7)(3-6)(5-4)
240 206	203 (1-6)(2-9)(3-8)(7-4)
270 209	208 (1-6)(2-9)(3-8)(A-5)

$B$	$B^* = D + T$
180 170	174 (1-7)(2-9)(3-6)(4-5)
180 172	180 (1-9)(2-6)(3-5)(4-7)
180 174	180 (1-8)(2-6)(3-7)(5-4)
180 176	180 (1-A)(2-8)(3-7)(5-4)
210 178	182 (1-A)(2-8)(3-4)(7-5)
210 181	186 (1-7)(2-6)(3-4)(5-8)
210 183	186 (1-7)(2-A)(3-4)(5-9)
210 185	190 (1-9)(2-8)(3-6)(5-4)
210 187	194 (1-9)(2-8)(3-6)(5-4)
210 189	194 (1-8)(2-A)(3-5)(4-6)
210 191	194 (1-A)(2-8)(3-6)(5-4)
210 193	198 (1-8)(2-6)(3-5)(4-7)
210 195	196 (1-6)(2-9)(3-4)(5-7)
240 197	203 (1-A)(2-7)(3-6)(4-5)
240 199	203 (1-8)(2-7)(3-6)(4-5)
240 201	203 (1-8)(2-9)(3-7)(4-5)
270 205	208 (1-A)(2-9)(3-5)(6-4)
270 207	208 (1-A)(2-9)(3-6)(5-4)

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