Fernando Q. Gouvêa*, Colby College, Department of Mathematics, Mayflower Hill 5836, Waterville, ME 04901. What are p-adic numbers and what are they for?

Many mathematicians, when they first learn about p-adic numbers, wonder what the point is: completing the rationals with respect to a different metric is kind of interesting, but doesn’t seem very important. We will begin with an elementary introduction to the p-adic numbers, then explore a little bit of their history with the goal of explaining why and when they are useful. (Received April 01, 2004)