
Pretraining Scaling Laws for Generative Evaluations of Language Models

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Abstract

Neural scaling laws have played a central role in modern machine learning, driving the field’s ever-expanding scaling of parameters, data and compute. While much research has gone into fitting scaling laws and predicting performance on pre-training losses and on *discriminative* evaluations such as multiple-choice question-answering benchmarks, comparatively little research has been done on fitting scaling laws and predicting performance on *generative* evaluations such as mathematical problem-solving or coding. In this work, we propose and evaluate two different pretraining scaling laws for fitting pass-at- k on generative evaluations and for predicting pass-at- k of the most expensive model using the performance of cheaper models. Our three scaling laws differ in the covariates used: (1) model parameters and pretraining tokens, (2) log likelihoods of gold reference solutions. We make four main contributions: First, we show how generative evaluations offer new hyperparameters (in our setting, k) that researchers can use to control the scaling laws parameters and the predictability of performance. Second, in terms of scaling law parameters, we find that the parameters + tokens scaling law stabilize for the last ~ 1.5 – 2.5 orders of magnitude, whereas the gold reference likelihood scaling law stabilizes for the last ~ 5 orders of magnitude. Third, in terms of predictive performance, we find both scaling laws perform comparably, although the log likelihoods of gold reference solutions predicts slightly worse for large k . Our framework provides researchers and practitioners with insights and methodologies to forecast generative performance, accelerating progress toward models that can reason, solve, and create.

1 Introduction

Neural scaling laws, which predictably map resources to the performance of neural networks, are foundational for developing frontier AI systems (Kaplan et al., 2020b; Hoffmann et al., 2022b). Such empirical regularities for improving model performance from scaling parameters, data, and compute have driven pursuit of ever-larger models. Much of the research in neural scaling laws has focused on fitting and predicting model performance on pretraining losses, e.g., (Kaplan et al., 2020b; Hoffmann et al., 2022b; Clark et al., 2022; Hernandez et al., 2022; Sardana et al., 2024; Muennighoff et al., 2023; Porian et al., 2024; Pearce & Song, 2024) and on “downstream” *discriminative* evaluations like multiple-choice question-answering, e.g., (Schaeffer et al., 2023; Gadre et al., 2024; Schaeffer et al., 2024; Grattafiori et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025; Bhagia et al., 2025).

While both pretraining losses and discriminative evaluations are undeniably useful, many capabilities we care about are *generative*: writing books, autoformalizing mathematics, or conducting cutting-edge research. Comparatively little research has investigated scaling laws for generative evaluations (OpenAI et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2024); for a deeper discussion of related work, please see Appendix B. Unlike pretraining losses and discriminative evaluations, generative evaluations

introduce new considerations such as which metric is used to quantify performance and how samples are drawn from the model, including the sampling temperature (Ackley et al., 1985) and the sampling algorithm, e.g., top-k (Fan et al., 2018), top-p (Holtzman et al., 2020).

In this work, we propose a framework for fitting scaling laws and predicting performance on generative evaluations, focusing on a particular setting: benchmarks with verifiable binary rewards, with multiple attempts per problem, with performance scored using the “pass-at- k ” metric (Kulal et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2021). We chose this setting due to its widespread use in the literature (First et al., 2023; Brown et al., 2024; Hassid et al., 2024; Hughes et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Ehrlich et al., 2025; Kwok et al., 2025). In this setting, we make the following contributions:

1. We propose three scaling laws that fit and predict pass-at- k from two different covariates: (1) model parameters and pretraining tokens (Sec. 3) and (2) likelihoods of gold reference solutions (Sec. 4).
2. We reveal that a hyperparameter specific to this setting – the number of attempts per problem k – offers a new lever to change the parameters of the scaling laws as well as how accurately the scaling laws extrapolate to more expensive models.
3. We quantify how stable each scaling law’s parameters are, finding that parameters the parameters + tokens scaling law stabilize by the last ~ 1.5 – 2.5 orders of magnitude of pretraining compute, whereas parameters for the gold reference likelihood scaling law are stable over the last ~ 5 orders of magnitude.
4. We quantify how predictive each scaling law is, finding that all three comparably predict the performance of the most expensive model based on cheaper models.

2 Methodology

Benchmark To study how language model performance changes during pretraining on generative evaluations, we used **GSM8K** (Cobbe et al., 2021), a well-established benchmark containing 8,500 grade school math word problems designed to evaluate a model’s ability to perform multi-step mathematical reasoning. Each attempt at solving a problem yields a binary outcome: the attempt is either successful or unsuccessful. Due to limited budget, we used a randomly chosen subset of 128 problems. See Appendix C for a description of how many samples we drew per problem per model.

Metric To evaluate the performance of each model, we used the ubiquitous pass-at- k metric (Kulal et al., 2019). For the i -th problem, a model’s pass rate at k attempts is the probability of the event that *any* of k attempts are successful. Because generative evaluations sample from the language model, this per-problem pass rate must be estimated. We use the unbiased, low variance and numerically stable estimator introduced by Chen et al. (2021), which, for each problem, draws $n_i > k$ samples, counts the number of successes $s_i \in [0, n_i]$, and then averages over all subsets of size k :

$$\text{pass}_i@k \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} 1 - \binom{n_i - s_i}{k} / \binom{n_i}{k}. \quad (1)$$

For a benchmark $\mathcal{B}$ of $|\mathcal{B}|$ problems, a model’s benchmark pass rate at k attempts is estimated as:

$$\text{pass}_{\mathcal{B}}@k \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \frac{1}{|\mathcal{B}|} \sum_{i \in \mathcal{B}} \text{pass}_i@k \quad (2)$$

Pass rates are sometimes phrased as the fraction of problems in the benchmark solved (“coverage”), but these two quantities are mathematically equivalent (Brown et al., 2024; Schaeffer et al., 2025b).

For the **sampling** and **language model family** descriptions, see the appendix section I.

3 Fitting and Predicting Pass Rates from Parameters and Tokens

We assessed how well the benchmark $\text{pass}_{\mathcal{B}}@k$ can be (1) fit and (2) predicted as a function of the number of model parameters N and pretraining tokens D .

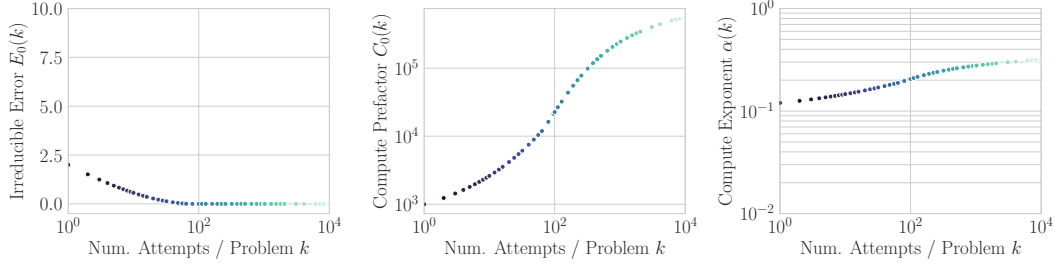


Figure 1: **Scaling Law Parameters Vary with Attempts per Problem (Full Fit).** In comparison with pretraining loss scaling laws and discriminative evaluation scaling laws, the number of attempts per problem k introduces a new hyperparameter that affects the parameters of generative evaluation scaling laws, and also how predictable $\text{pass}_B@k$ is. Here we show the effect of k for the pretraining compute scaling law (Eqn. 6); for a side-by-side comparison with our next two scaling laws, see Appendix D. **Left:** The irreducible error $E_0(k)$ falls roughly exponentially with k and is ≈ 0 by $k \approx 10^2$, consistent with the probability that a problem remains unsolved decaying exponentially in the number of attempts. **Center:** The compute prefactor $C_0(k)$ increases monotonically with k , indicating that once $E_0(k) \rightarrow 0$, variation is dominated by the compute-dependent term. **Right:** The compute exponent $\alpha(k)$ increases smoothly, from ~ 0.15 at $k=1$ to ~ 0.3 at $k=10^4$, implying steeper and more regular scaling at larger k . Hue corresponds to k .

3.1 Fitting Pass Rates from Model Parameters and Pretraining Tokens

Motivated by Hoffmann et al. (2022b), we posited that the negative log of benchmark pass rates might instead follow a scaling law as a function of model parameters N and pretraining tokens D :

$$-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)(N, D, k) = \mathcal{E}_0(k) + \frac{N_0(k)}{N^{\beta(k)}} + \frac{D_0(k)}{D^{\gamma(k)}}, \quad (3)$$

where $\mathcal{E}_0(k)$ is the irreducible error, $N_0(k)$ is the parameter scaling prefactor, $\beta(k)$ is the parameter scaling coefficient, $D_0(k)$ is the token scaling prefactor and $\gamma(k)$ is the token scaling coefficient.

We fit this parameters + tokens scaling law. Visually, this law provides a better characterization of performance for the full range of models, with the fitted curves appearing tighter and reducing the residual scatter (Fig.9). The irreducible error term $\mathcal{E}_0(k)$ decreases with the number of attempts per problem k , although it does so more gradually, reaching zero by $k \approx 3 \times 10^2$ (Fig. 5). However, despite the improved global fit, we observed that the largest-compute model checkpoints in our dataset exhibit a comparatively large relative error, suggesting that while this law better explains the performance of less-trained models, it may struggle with extrapolation to the frontier.

3.2 Predicting Pass Rates from Model Parameters and Pretraining Tokens

We evaluated how predictive the parameters + tokens scaling law is using the same backtesting approach (Section F.2). We again used Pythia 12B model trained for 300B tokens as the target, and iteratively fit Eqn. 3. The relative error in predicting the target model’s performance decreases and then plateaus as more capable models are included in the fit (Fig. 10, Top Left). For all values of k , these extrapolations become reliable once the largest checkpoint used for fitting is within approximately ~ 2 – 2.5 orders of magnitude of the target’s compute. Similarly, the five backtested scaling parameters converge to their full-fit values once models within this same compute range of ~ 1.5 – 2.5 orders of magnitude are included (Fig. 10, Other Five Panels). For small k , this law shows a slight predictive advantage over the compute-only baseline (see Appendix K), an effect that vanishes at larger k .

4 Fitting and Predicting Pass Rates from Gold Reference Likelihoods

Generative evaluations oftentimes contain not just problems and correct answers, but also “gold references”: high quality responses that reach the correct answer from the given problem. For autoregressive language models, one can straightforwardly compute the likelihood of the gold

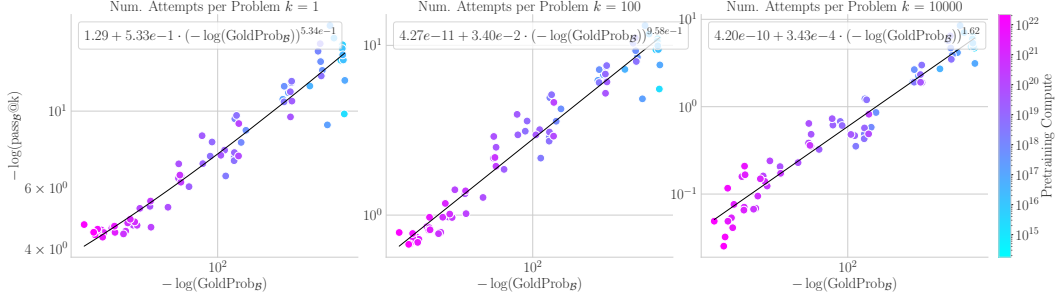


Figure 2: **Scaling of Pass Rates with Gold Reference Likelihood (Full Fit).** Each panel fits Eqn. 5, $-\log(\text{pass}_B@k) = \xi_0 + K_0(k) \cdot [-\log(\text{GoldProb}_B)]^{\kappa(k)}$, for $k \in \{1, 10^2, 10^4\}$. Regressing the gold reference log-likelihoods against the pass rates produces a visually tighter fit with less residual scatter than the compute scaling law (cf. Fig. 7). As k increases, the irreducible error $\hat{\xi}_0(k)$ falls toward zero and the exponent $\hat{\kappa}(k)$ increases, making the relationship a steeper, purer power law.

reference given the problem, as well as the arithmetic mean over the benchmark’s gold reference probabilities:

$$\text{GoldProb}_B \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \frac{1}{|\mathcal{B}|} \sum_{i \in \mathcal{B}} p_\theta(\text{Gold Reference}_i | \text{Problem}_i), \quad (4)$$

For our gold reference likelihood scaling law, we assessed how well the benchmark $\text{pass}_B@k$ can be (1) fit and (2) predicted as a function of the log likelihoods of the gold references.

4.1 Fitting Pass Rates from Gold Reference Likelihoods

Motivated by Schaeffer et al. (2024), we tested whether this average likelihood of the gold responses can be accurately regressed to fit and predict benchmark pass rates $\text{pass}_B@k$.

$$-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)(\text{GoldProb}_B, k) = \xi_0(k) + K_0(k) \cdot \left[-\log(\text{GoldProb}_B) \right]^{\kappa(k)} \quad (5)$$

Perhaps surprisingly, we discovered that this straightforwardly computable quantity serves as an accurate predictor of benchmark pass rates. As shown in Figure 2, regressing against the negative log likelihood of the gold references produces a visually tighter fit than the pretraining compute law (Fig. 7). The residual scatter is reduced, and the relationship between $-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)$ and $-\log(\text{GoldProb}_B)$ has a smaller reducible error and more closely resembles a power law. We next examined how the number of attempts per problem k influences the scaling law’s parameters (Fig. 6). Consistent with our findings for the prior two scaling laws, the irreducible error term $\xi_0(k)$ collapses toward zero as k increases and the exponent $\kappa(k)$ increases smoothly.

4.2 Predicting Pass Rates from Gold Reference Likelihoods

Using our backtesting approach once more, we evaluated how well the gold references scaling law can predict the performance of our most expensive model. For small k , the gold reference likelihoods scaling law has slightly lower relative error at predicting the most expensive model’s performance, but worsens for larger k (Fig. 11 Upper Left). The most remarkable result, however, is the stability of the scaling law’s parameters. In stark contrast to the parameter + token scaling laws whose parameters only stabilized when fit on models within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target, the parameters for the gold reference law are exceptionally robust: the backtested estimates for the three parameters converge to their final values when fitting on models up to ~ 5 of magnitude cheaper than the target (Fig. 11, Other Three Panels) and for all values of k . This significantly stable finding suggests that the relationship between gold reference likelihoods and pass rates is a consistent signal, enabling long-range forecasts from comparatively inexpensive models.

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 581 Mallet, Mitch Rudominer, Eric Johnston, Sushil Mittal, Akhil Udathu, Janara Christensen, Vishal
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 587 Stanczyk, Ye Zhang, David Steiner, Subhagit Naskar, Michael Azzam, Matthew Johnson, Adam
 588 Paszke, Chung-Cheng Chiu, Jaume Sanchez Elias, Afroz Mohiuddin, Faizan Muhammad, Jin
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 592 Petrychenko, Zhe Chen, Johnson Jia, Anselm Levskaya, Zhenkai Zhu, Peter Grabowski, Yu Mao,
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 601 Fan Yang, Jeff Piper, Nathan Ie, Rama Pasumarthi, Nathan Lintz, Anitha Vijayakumar, Daniel
 602 Andor, Pedro Valenzuela, Minnie Lui, Cosmin Paduraru, Daiyi Peng, Katherine Lee, Shuyuan
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 613 Reiko Tojo, Michael Kwong, James Lee-Thorp, Christopher Yew, Danila Sinopalnikov, Sabela
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 615 Rory Greig, Jennifer Beattie, Emily Caveness, Libin Bai, Julian Eisenschlos, Alex Korchemniy,
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 618 Rosen, Sasan Tavakkol, Linting Xue, Chen Elkind, Oliver Woodman, John Carpenter, George
 619 Papamakarios, Rupert Kemp, Sushant Kafle, Tanya Grunina, Rishika Sinha, Alice Talbert, Diane
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 621 Jing Li, Saaber Fatehi, John Wieting, Omar Ajmeri, Benigno Uribe, Yeongil Ko, Laura Knight,
 622 Amélie Héliou, Ning Niu, Shane Gu, Chenxi Pang, Yeqing Li, Nir Levine, Ariel Stolovich, Rebeca
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 624 Deck, Hyo Lee, Zonglin Li, Kyle Levin, Raphael Hoffmann, Dan Holtmann-Rice, Olivier Bachem,
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647 Li, Anoop Sinha, Weiren Wang, Julia Wiesinger, Emmanouil Koukoumidis, Yuan Tian, Anand
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649 Urbanowicz, Jennimaria Palomaki, Chrisantha Fernando, Ken Durden, Harsh Mehta, Nikola
650 Momchev, Elahe Rahimtoroghi, Maria Georgaki, Amit Raul, Sebastian Ruder, Morgan Redshaw,
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704 **A Language Model Usage**

705 Language models were used by the authors to aid or polish the writing of the paper. Authors take full
706 responsibility for the content.

B Related Work

The study of neural scaling laws, which characterize how model performance predictably improves with resources, has become a cornerstone of modern large-scale machine learning (Hestness et al., 2017; Kaplan et al., 2020a; Hoffmann et al., 2022a; Roberts et al., 2022; Bahri et al., 2024). Foundational work demonstrated that pretraining loss follows a power law with respect to model size, dataset size, and training compute (Kaplan et al., 2020a; Henighan et al., 2020; Hoffmann et al., 2022a). These principles now guide the development of nearly all state-of-the-art language models (OpenAI et al., 2024; Team et al., 2024; Grattafiori et al., 2024; DeepSeek-AI et al., 2025; Qwen et al., 2025; Zhipu-AI et al., 2025). This research area has since expanded to explore scaling properties in diverse domains, including computer vision (Zhai et al., 2022), machine translation (Ghorbani et al., 2021), and even for optimizing inference-time compute rather than training (Wu et al., 2024; Snell et al., 2024). Despite this breadth, scaling laws for complex, multi-step *generative tasks*—which often represent the ultimate goal of language modeling—have remained comparatively underexplored due to the challenges of evaluation. Our work builds most directly on recent efforts to forecast performance on such generative evaluations. The *GPT-4 Technical Report* pioneered this direction by showing that the negative log pass rate on a subset of the HumanEval coding benchmark scaled predictably as a power law of pretraining compute (OpenAI et al., 2024). They successfully predicted GPT-4’s performance by extrapolating from smaller models over approximately three orders of magnitude (OpenAI et al., 2024). We adopt their proposed functional form for our compute-based law and extend their work by systematically analyzing how the number of attempts, k , reshapes the law’s parameters. Furthermore, our rigorous backtesting reveals the brittleness of this compute-only law, finding it reliable only across 1-2 orders of magnitude in our setting. Separately, our work shares a philosophical motivation with Hu et al. (2024), who investigate emergent abilities. They argue that seemingly unpredictable jumps in performance on discriminative tasks can be understood as smooth, continuous improvements when measured by the model’s underlying log-likelihoods. We apply a similar insight to a different problem: forecasting. We operationalize the log probability of gold-standard solutions not just as an explanatory tool, but as a direct covariate in a predictive scaling law for generative tasks, and we empirically demonstrate its superior stability for long-range extrapolation.

736 C Methodology: Number of Samples Per Problem Per Model

737 Because sampling from language models is expensive and because our compute budget is limited, we
 738 needed to judiciously choose how many samples to draw per problem per model. A key consideration
 739 is that the number of samples per problem sets the resolution, i.e., if we draw n samples per problem,
 740 then any pass rate on that problem below $1/n$ will appear to be 0. Since pass rates typically increase
 741 with pretraining compute, we chose a loose heuristic based on the pretraining compute of each model.
 742 For a model with C pretraining FLOP, we aimed to sample

$$\text{Num. Samples per Problem} = \text{clip}(100 \cdot 10^{23-\log_{10}(C)}, 3.2e4, 1e6).$$

743 $3.2e4$ was chosen so that we would have more samples per problem than the largest number of
 744 attempts per problem k we considered ($1e4$). Fig. 3 shows how many samples per problem per model
 745 we had at the time our analyses were conducted. Additional sampling would have likely benefited
 746 our analyses.

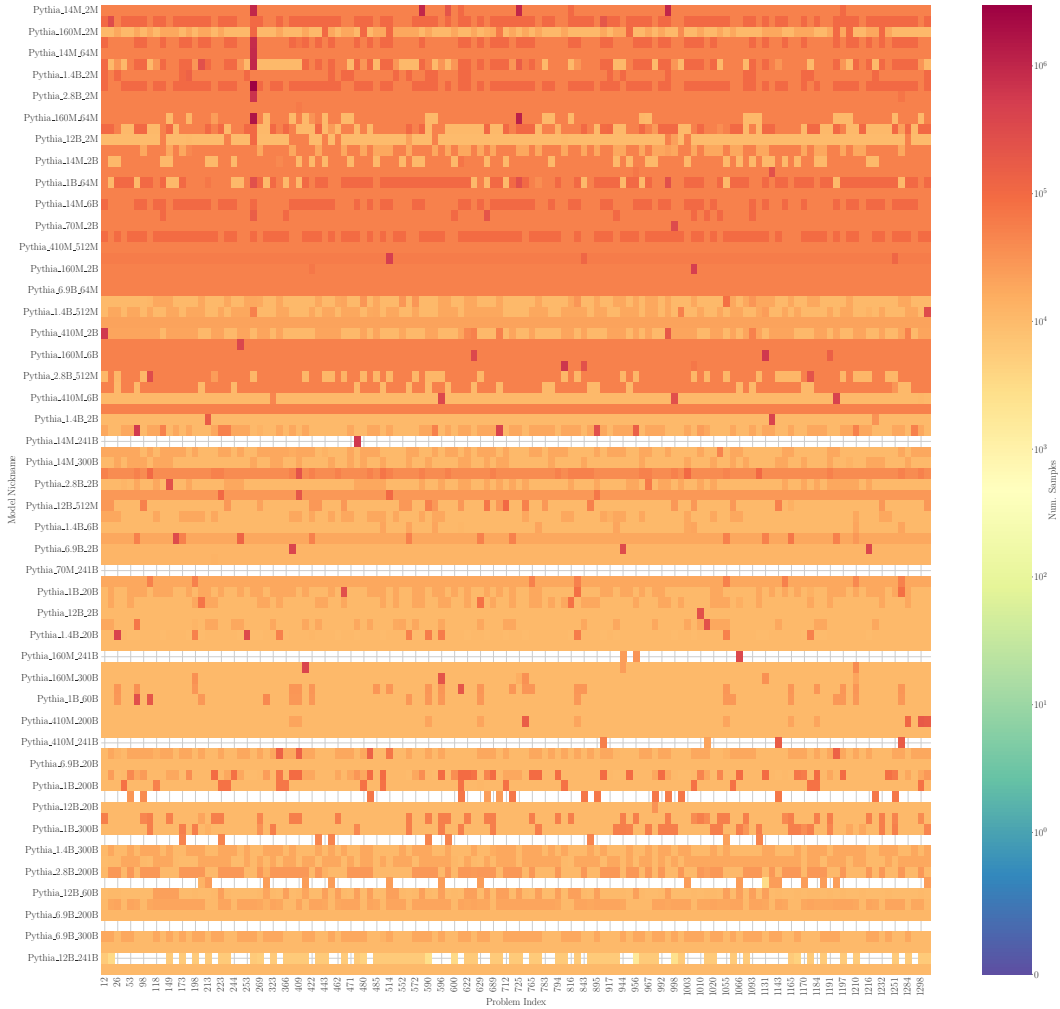


Figure 3: **Number of Samples per Model per Problem.** This heatmap visualizes how many samples we had drawn per model (y-axis) per problem (x-axis) at the time our analyses were conducted.

747 D Scaling Law Parameters by Number of Attempts Per Problem k

748 For the three scaling laws we consider, we visualize how the fit parameters change as a function of
 749 the number of attempts per problem k (Fig. 4, Fig. 5, Fig. 6).

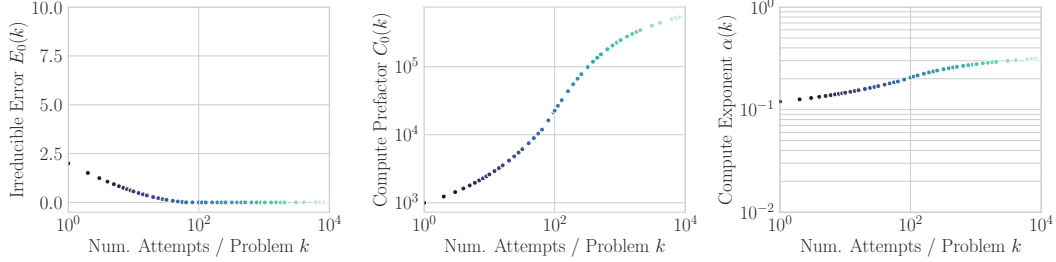


Figure 4: Pretraining Compute Scaling Law Parameters by Number of Attempts per Problem (Full Fits). We visualize how the parameters of Eqn. 6 change with respect to k . Hue corresponds to k .

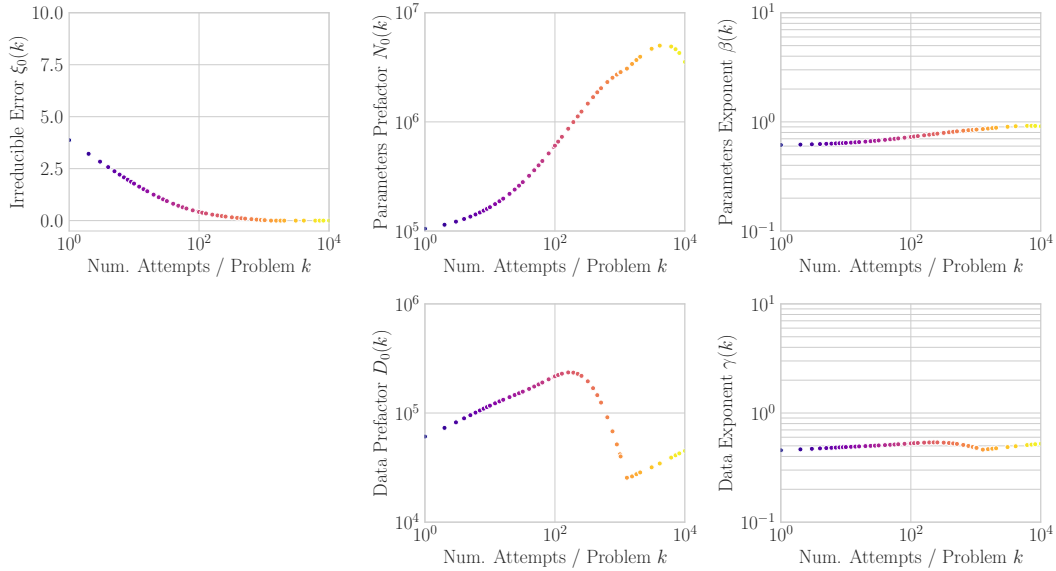


Figure 5: Model Parameters and Tokens Scaling Law Parameters by Number of Attempts per Problem (Full Fits). We visualize how the parameters of Eqn. 3 change with respect to k . Hue corresponds to k .

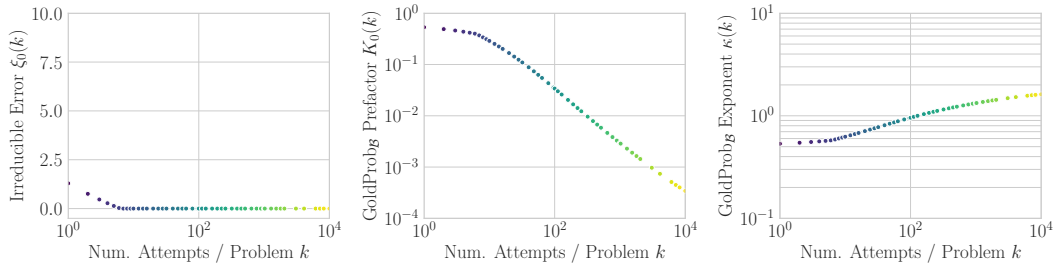


Figure 6: Gold Reference Log Likelihoods Scaling Law Parameters by Number of Attempts per Problem (Full Fits). We visualize how the parameters of Eqn. 4 change with respect to k . Hue corresponds to k .

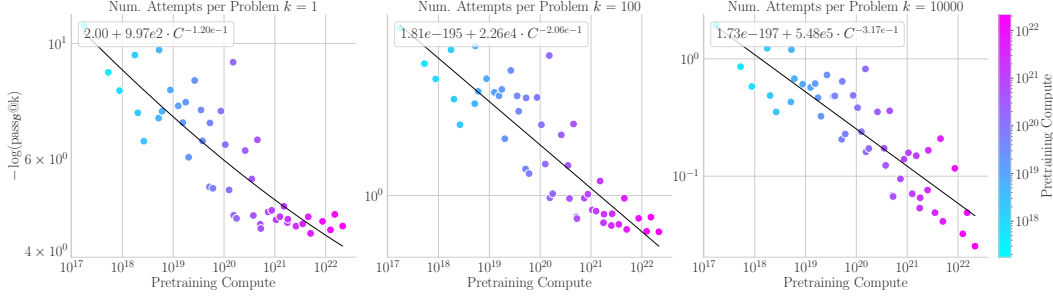


Figure 7: **Scaling of Pass Rates with Pretraining Compute (Full Fit).** Each panel fits Eqn. 6 $-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)(C, k) = E_0(k) + C_0(k) \cdot C^{-\alpha(k)}$ to GSM8K pass rates for Pythia checkpoints across ~ 5 orders of magnitude of pretraining compute. Panels show $k \in \{1, 10^2, 10^4\}$. The fit curves capture the trend moderately well and reveal two effects of increasing k : (i) the irreducible error $\hat{E}_0(k)$ falls from $2 \rightarrow 0$ as k increases from $1 \rightarrow 100$; and (ii) the compute-dependent terms increase with k : the prefactor grows from $\hat{C}_0(k=1) \approx 1e3$ to $\hat{C}_0(k=10000) \sim 7.8e5$ and the exponent rises from $\hat{\alpha}(k=1) \approx 0.120$ to $\hat{\alpha}(k=100) \approx 0.325$. **Takeaway:** Larger k makes the relationship a pure power law and makes pass rates a steeper function of pretraining compute.

E Compute Scaling Law

We took the standard approximation for pretraining compute of $C \approx 6 \cdot N \cdot D$ (Kaplan et al., 2020b; Hoffmann et al., 2022b; Pearce & Song, 2024; Gadre et al., 2024; Schaeffer et al., 2024; Porian et al., 2024).

F Fitting and Predicting Pass Rates from Pretraining Compute

For our first scaling law, we assessed how well the benchmark $\text{pass}_B@k$ can be (1) *fit* as a function of pretraining compute C and (2) *predicted* from pretraining compute.

F.1 Fitting Pass Rates from Pretraining Compute

Motivated by the GPT-4 Technical Report (OpenAI et al., 2024), we posited that the negative log of benchmark pass rates follows a scaling law as a function of model pretraining compute C :

$$-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)(C, k) = E_0(k) + \frac{C_0(k)}{C^{\alpha(k)}}, \quad (6)$$

where $E_0(k) \geq 0$ is the irreducible error, $C_0(k) > 0$ is the compute scaling prefactor, and $\alpha(k) > 0$ is the compute scaling exponent. In contrast with prior research on scaling laws, parameters that were previously constant are now parameterized by the number of attempts per problem k . Thus, k can be viewed as a hyperparameter that offers a new lever to change the predictability of scaling laws in a way that is not available for pretraining loss or discriminative evaluation scaling laws.

We fit the scaling law parameters based on the model checkpoints' pretraining compute and their corresponding $\text{pass}_B@k$. Visually, the fit scaling laws captured the trend reasonably well for different values of number of attempts per problem k (Fig. 7). We next evaluated what role the number of attempts per problem k has on the scaling law parameters: As k increases, the irreducible error term $E_0(k)$ falls roughly exponentially with k and is effectively 0 by $k \approx 1 \times 10^2$ (Fig. 1 Left). This is consistent with the probability a problem goes unsolved falling exponentially with the number of attempts per problem (Levi, 2025; Schaeffer et al., 2025b). Thus, by increasing k , Eqn. 6 becomes a pure power law with no irreducible error. In comparison, as k increases, the compute prefactor and compute exponent also increase, with the compute prefactor rising ~ 4 orders of magnitude (Fig. 1 Center) and the compute exponent rising moderately from 1.20×10^{-1} to 3.25×10^{-1} (Fig. 1 Right).

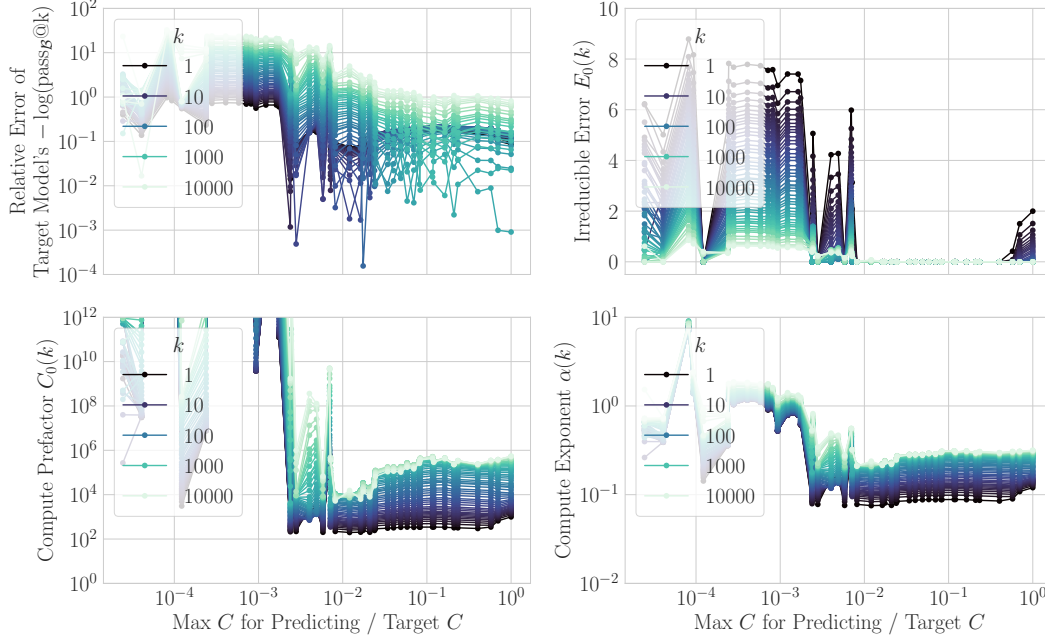


Figure 8: **Predicting Pass Rates from Scaling Pretraining Compute (Backtesting).** We evaluate predictability via *backtesting*: we iteratively fit Eq. 6 on subsets of models up to a maximum pretraining compute, then extrapolate to predict the most expensive model’s $-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)$. The most expensive model is Pythia 12B-parameter 300B-token ($\approx 2.16 \times 10^{22}$ FLOP). The x -axis in all panels is the ratio of the largest-compute checkpoint included in the fit to the target model’s compute. **Top Left:** Relative error decreases as higher-compute checkpoints are included and then plateaus: for $k \in \{1, 10^2\}$ the plateau occurs once the fit includes checkpoints within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target; for $k=10^4$ it occurs within ~ 1.5 order. **Other Three Panels:** Backtested estimates of the scaling law parameters converge as the fit includes higher-compute checkpoints, stabilizing to full-fit values once included models are within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target.

F.2 Predicting Pass Rates from Pretraining Compute

Previously, we fit Eqn. 6 using all available checkpoints. However, a key motivation for scaling laws is *prediction*: can we forecast the performance of an expensive model using cheaper models?

We evaluated the predictability of pass rates via backtesting, a cross-validation-like process for evaluating forecasts in which cheaper models are used to predict the performance of the most expensive model. We fixed a target model checkpoint pretrained on C_{target} FLOP; in our work, we used Pythia-12B trained for 300B tokens, pretrained with approximately 2.16×10^{22} FLOP. For a sequence of compute caps $C_{\text{max}} \leq C_{\text{target}}$, we: (i) fit Eq. 6 on all model checkpoints with compute $C \leq C_{\text{max}}$ to obtain $\hat{E}_0(k)$, $\hat{C}_0(k)$, and $\hat{\alpha}(k)$; (ii) extrapolate to the target compute horizon, and (iii) measure the absolute relative error to the target model’s $-\log(\text{pass}_B@k_{\text{target}})$:

$$\text{RelativeError}(k, C_{\text{max}}) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \frac{|\text{abs}[-\log(\text{pass}_B@k_{\text{target}}) - \hat{E}_0(k) - \hat{C}_0(k) \cdot C_{\text{target}}^{-\hat{\alpha}(k)}]|}{-\log(\text{pass}_B@k_{\text{target}})}.$$

We report results as a function of the compute ratio $C_{\text{max}}/C_{\text{target}}$.

Relative errors typically decrease and then plateau as higher-compute checkpoints are included in the fit (Fig. 8, top left). For $k \in \{1, 1e2\}$, reliable extrapolation requires that the largest checkpoint used for fitting is within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target’s compute, and the relative errors plateau at 1×10^{-1} . In comparison, for $k = 1e4$, reliable extrapolation requires ~ 1.5 order of magnitude, and the relative errors plateau below 1. Similarly, the backtested estimates of the parameters $\hat{E}_0(k)$, $\hat{C}_0(k)$ and $\hat{\alpha}(k)$ converge to their full-fit values once models within ~ 1.5 – 2.5 orders of magnitude of C_{target} are included (Fig. 8, other three panels). For these models on this benchmark, the compute

793 scaling law provides useful forecasts so long as forecasts are made using models within ~ 2 orders
 794 of magnitude of compute as the target model; when only smaller checkpoints are available, the
 795 predictive error increases and the fitted parameters are unreliable.

796 **G Relation Between the Compute Scaling Law and the Parameters + Tokens** 797 **Scaling Law**

798 Here, we provide a concrete analytic relation between Eqn. 6 and Eqn. 3 provided in the main text.
 799 For a fixed benchmark $\mathcal{B}$ and number of attempts per problem k , we model

$$-\log(\text{pass}_{\mathcal{B}} @ k)(N, D, k) = \mathcal{E}_0(k) + \frac{N_0(k)}{N^{\beta(k)}} + \frac{D_0(k)}{D^{\gamma(k)}}, \quad (7)$$

800 and, when training under a compute budget $C = cND$,

$$-\log(\text{pass}_{\mathcal{B}} @ k)(C, k) = E(k) + \frac{C_0(k)}{C^{\alpha(k)}}. \quad (8)$$

801 **Compute-optimal envelope.** Assume the excess loss *beyond the irreducible term* is additive and
 802 separable in (N, D) as in Eq. 7, with $N_0(k), D_0(k) > 0$ and exponents $\beta(k), \gamma(k) > 0$. For each
 803 fixed k , define

$$A = N_0(k), \quad B = D_0(k), \quad \beta = \beta(k), \quad \gamma = \gamma(k), \quad (9)$$

804 and

$$F(N, D) = \frac{A}{N^{\beta}} + \frac{B}{D^{\gamma}}, \quad \mathcal{F}(C) = \min_{\substack{N, D > 0: \\ cND = C}} F(N, D). \quad (10)$$

805 Then the compute law Eq. 8 is the compute-optimal envelope of Eq. 7, with

$$E(k) = \mathcal{E}_0(k), \quad \alpha(k) = \frac{\beta(k)\gamma(k)}{\beta(k) + \gamma(k)} = \left(\frac{1}{\beta(k)} + \frac{1}{\gamma(k)} \right)^{-1}, \quad (11)$$

806

$$C_0(k) = (\beta + \gamma) \beta^{-\frac{\beta}{\beta+\gamma}} \gamma^{-\frac{\gamma}{\beta+\gamma}} A^{\frac{\gamma}{\beta+\gamma}} B^{\frac{\beta}{\beta+\gamma}} c^{\alpha(k)}. \quad (12)$$

807 The compute-optimal allocation along the envelope is

$$N^*(C, k) = \left(\frac{\beta A}{\gamma B} \right)^{\frac{1}{\beta+\gamma}} \left(\frac{C}{c} \right)^{\frac{\gamma}{\beta+\gamma}}, \quad D^*(C, k) = \left(\frac{\gamma B}{\beta A} \right)^{\frac{1}{\beta+\gamma}} \left(\frac{C}{c} \right)^{\frac{\beta}{\beta+\gamma}}. \quad (13)$$

808 **Derivation Sketch.** Form the Lagrangian $\mathcal{L} = AN^{-\beta} + BD^{-\gamma} + \lambda(ND - C/c)$. First-order
 809 conditions give $\beta AN^{-\beta} = \gamma BD^{-\gamma}$ and $ND = C/c$, from which (A.5) follows. Substituting
 810 N^*, D^* into $F(N, D)$ yields $\mathcal{F}(C) = C_0(k) C^{-\alpha(k)}$ with $\alpha(k)$ and $C_0(k)$ as in Eqs. 11-12, and
 811 $E(k) = \mathcal{E}_0(k)$.

812 **Remarks.**

- 813 1. The compute exponent is the parallel sum of the (N, D) exponents: $\alpha = (1/\beta + 1/\gamma)^{-1}$.
- 814 2. If $\beta = \gamma$, then $\alpha = \beta/2$ and $N^*, D^* \propto C^{1/2}$ with $C_0 = 2\beta^{-1}(AB)^{1/2}c^{\beta/2}$.
- 815 3. If one scales N and D at a fixed ratio (i.e., without re-optimizing with C), the effective
 816 compute exponent degrades to $\alpha_{\text{path}} = \min\{\beta, \gamma\}/2$.
- 817 4. All quantities may depend on k ; the mapping in Eqs. 11-13 applies point-wise in k . The
 818 conversion constant c enters only via C_0 , not α .

819 G.1 Multiplicative deviation from the optimal compute envelope

820 Let $(N^*(C), D^*(C))$ denote the compute-optimal allocation in Eq. 13 and define the *misallocation*
821 *ratio*

$$r(C) := \frac{N(C)}{N^*(C)} = \frac{D^*(C)}{D(C)}. \quad (14)$$

822 A direct algebraic manipulation using the first-order optimality condition $\beta A(N^*)^{-\beta} = \gamma B(D^*)^{-\gamma}$
823 gives the exact factorization

$$\frac{-\log(\text{pass}_{\mathcal{B}} @k)(C) - \mathcal{E}_0}{-\log(\text{pass}_{\mathcal{B}} @k)_{\text{opt}}(C) - \mathcal{E}_0} = \Phi(r; \beta, \gamma) := \frac{\gamma}{\beta + \gamma} r^{-\beta} + \frac{\beta}{\beta + \gamma} r^{\gamma} \geq 1, \quad (15)$$

824 with equality iff $r \equiv 1$. Equivalently, this produces a multiplicative correction to Eq. 8

$$-\log(\text{pass}_{\mathcal{B}} @k)(C) = \mathcal{E}_0 + C_0 C^{-\alpha} \underbrace{\Phi\left(\frac{N}{N^*}; \beta, \gamma\right)}_{\text{misallocation factor} \geq 1}. \quad (16)$$

825 Thus the deviation from equality is *fully parameterized* by r via the dimensionless penalty $\Phi \geq 1$.

826 **Local and asymptotic behavior of the penalty.** Let $t = \log r$. A Taylor expansion of equation 15
827 around $r = 1$ gives

$$\Phi(r; \beta, \gamma) = 1 + \frac{\beta\gamma}{2} t^2 + O(t^3), \quad (17)$$

828 so small misallocations incur only a *quadratic* penalty in log-space. Along a power-law path $N \propto C^p$
829 (with constants absorbed into r), $t = (p - \frac{\gamma}{\beta+\gamma}) \log C + O(1)$; hence if $p \neq \frac{\gamma}{\beta+\gamma}$ the penalty grows
830 polynomially:

$$\Phi(r(C)) \asymp \begin{cases} \frac{\beta}{\beta+\gamma} r(C)^{\gamma}, & r(C) \rightarrow \infty \quad (\text{over-allocating } N), \\ \frac{\gamma}{\beta+\gamma} r(C)^{-\beta}, & r(C) \rightarrow 0 \quad (\text{under-allocating } N). \end{cases} \quad (18)$$

831 This isolates the compute-optimal scaling $C^{-\alpha}$ and expresses all off-ridge effects through a *single*,
832 dimensionless factor depending only on the allocation ratio N/N^* (or equivalently D^*/D).

833 We conclude that if one matches the compute law without optimizing (N, D) , the result is *not* a
834 single power law in general: it is a compute-optimal power multiplied by a misallocation penalty
835 $\Phi(N/N^*) \geq 1$.

836 H How the Compute Scaling Law Emerges from the Parameters + Tokens 837 Scaling Law

838 The approximately equivalent performance between the compute scaling law (Eqn. 6) and the
839 parameters+tokens scaling law (Eqn. 3) led us to ask whether a deeper connection might exist. We
840 discovered that *the compute scaling law is the compute-optimal envelope of the parameters+tokens*
841 *scaling law*. We summarize the insight here and defer a full explanation to Appendix G.

842 Fix a benchmark $\mathcal{B}$ and attempts per problem k . Consider a compute budget $C \approx cND$. The
843 best achievable error is obtained by minimizing the right-hand side of Eqn. 3 over all (N, D) with
844 $ND = C/c$. Evaluating at the optimizer yields Eqn. 6. The mapping of exponents and constants is:

$$\alpha(k) = \left(\frac{1}{\beta(k)} + \frac{1}{\gamma(k)} \right)^{-1}, \quad E_0(k) = \mathcal{E}_0(k),$$

845 with a closed-form $C_0(k)$.

846 **Compute-Optimal Allocation.** Along the envelope (i.e., when Eqn. 6 is tight), the optimal split of
847 compute between parameters and tokens is

$$N^*(C, k) = \left(\frac{\beta N_0(k)}{\gamma D_0(k)} \right)^{\frac{1}{\beta+\gamma}} \left(\frac{C}{c} \right)^{\frac{\gamma}{\beta+\gamma}}, \quad D^*(C, k) = \left(\frac{\gamma D_0(k)}{\beta N_0(k)} \right)^{\frac{1}{\beta+\gamma}} \left(\frac{C}{c} \right)^{\frac{\beta}{\beta+\gamma}}.$$

Thus the parameter/token ratio *shift with scale* according to β, γ ; when $\beta = \gamma$, both grow like $C^{1/2}$.
Departures from the Envelope. If training does not follow the compute-optimal allocation (N^*, D^*) ,
define the misallocation ratio $r(C) = \frac{N}{N^*(C)} = \frac{D^*(C)}{D}$. The departure from the envelope is *multi-*
plicative on top of Eqn. 6:

$$-\log(\text{pass}_B @ k)(C, k) = E_0(k) + C_0(k) \cdot C^{-\alpha(k)} \cdot \underbrace{\left[\frac{\gamma}{\beta + \gamma} r^{-\beta} + \frac{\beta}{\beta + \gamma} r^\gamma \right]}_{\Phi(r; \beta, \gamma) \geq 1},$$

with equality iff $r \equiv 1$. Small deviations are benign ($\Phi = 1 + \frac{\beta\gamma}{2} (\log r)^2 + O(\log r)^3$), but
persistent off-ridge scaling yields a growing penalty. A useful case: if one scales N and D at a *fixed*
ratio (i.e., without re-optimizing with C), the effective compute slope degrades to $\alpha_{\text{path}} = \frac{\min\{\beta, \gamma\}}{2}$.

Takeaways. (i) The compute law is not an independent phenomenology; it is the optimal-allocation
shadow of the parameters + tokens law. (ii) Use the allocation above to stay on-envelope when
planning larger models. (iii) Implementation constants relating C to ND shift $C_0(k)$, but do not
change $\alpha(k)$. All statements hold pointwise in k .

I Methodology (Cont.)

Sampling We used temperature-only sampling (Ackley et al., 1985) at $\tau=1.0$ and did not sweep due
to prior work (Schaeffer et al., 2025a).

Language Model Family For our experiments, we used the Pythia family (Biderman et al., 2023),
which contains 8 models from 14M to 12B parameters pretrained on 300B tokens from The Pile (Gao
et al., 2020). We used 8 checkpoints per parameter size of the non-duplicated variants, but excluded
extremely overtrained checkpoints identified as abnormal by prior work (Godey et al., 2024). Each
model checkpoint has a specific number of model parameters (N) and has been trained on a certain
number of tokens (D). We use intermediate checkpoints in lieu of fully trained models, and note that
our results would likely improve with greater experimental control.

J Discussion

In this work, we investigated pretraining scaling laws for generative evaluations of language models.
Our work was motivated most directly by OpenAI et al. (2024)’s success at predicting pass rates at
HumanEval (Chen et al., 2021), as well as by Hu et al. (2024).

Key Findings Our work’s main contribution is the proposal and rigorous backtesting of three distinct
scaling laws for pass-at- k , using (1) pretraining compute, (2) model parameters and pretraining tokens,
and (3) gold reference log likelihoods as covariates. We demonstrate that a key hyperparameter in
generative evaluation – the number of attempts per problem k – offers a novel lever for controlling
the scaling law parameters and predictability. Empirically, we find that while all three laws have
comparable predictive accuracy, the parameters of the gold reference likelihood law are uniquely
stable, converging across nearly five orders of magnitude of compute. Finally, we establish a
theoretical connection between the compute law and the parameters + tokens law, proving that the
compute law emerges as the compute-optimal envelope of the parameters-and-tokens law.

Limitations The main limitation of this work is that the empirical results are based on a single
benchmark (GSM8K) and a single model family (Pythia). Additionally, we consider only pass-at- k
generative evaluations, whereas other are of course worth considering as well.

Related Work Due to space constraints, we defer related work to Appendix B.

Future Directions Multiple next steps are clear. First, subsequent work should determine whether
predictions can be made more accurately using either additional sampling or controlled pretrained
models. Second, OpenAI et al. (2024) claimed subsetting and/or stratifying problems enabled better
predictions; what exactly did this approach entail, and how much did it help? Third, the utility of the
gold reference log likelihoods was perhaps surprising because if we think of next-token sampling as a
branching process, there are likely exponentially many paths from the problem to the correct answer,

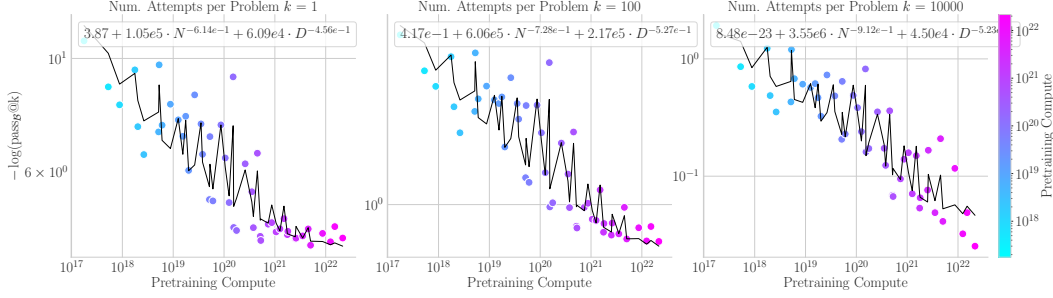


Figure 9: **Scaling of Pass Rates with Model Parameters and Pretraining Data (Full Fit).** Each panel fits Eqn. 3, $-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)(N, D, k) = \mathcal{E}_0(k) + N_0(k) N^{-\beta(k)} + D_0(k) D^{-\gamma(k)}$. Relative to the compute scaling law, using parameters N and tokens D instead yields tighter in-range fits for all k . Consistent with Fig. 1, the irreducible error decreases sharply with k (e.g., $\hat{\mathcal{E}}_0: 3.87 \rightarrow 0$ by $k \approx 10^2$), after which variation is dominated by the (N, D) terms. Despite the better global fit, the largest-compute model checkpoint in each panel exhibits comparatively large relative error.

and it is unclear that the benchmark-provided gold references have any meaningful relationship with likely samples from the model; this raises at least two future questions: (i) how general is this relationship across benchmarks and models, and (ii) to what extent can this indicator be trusted for predicting the performance of more expensive models, especially under optimization pressure?

K Predictive Performance (Backtesting Results)

To evaluate the predictive power of each scaling law, we performed backtesting: fitting the law on cheaper checkpoints and extrapolating to the 12B-parameter model trained on 300B tokens. For the compute scaling law, predictions become reliable once models within roughly two orders of magnitude of the target are included, after which errors plateau. The parameters+tokens scaling law provides tighter in-range fits and slightly lower relative error for small k , but still requires models within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target for stable predictions. The gold reference likelihood law yields comparable predictive accuracy overall but exhibits exceptional stability: its parameters converge even when fit using models up to five orders of magnitude cheaper. Together, these results show that all three laws can forecast performance, with the gold reference law offering the most robust long-range signal. The following figures illustrate these findings in detail.

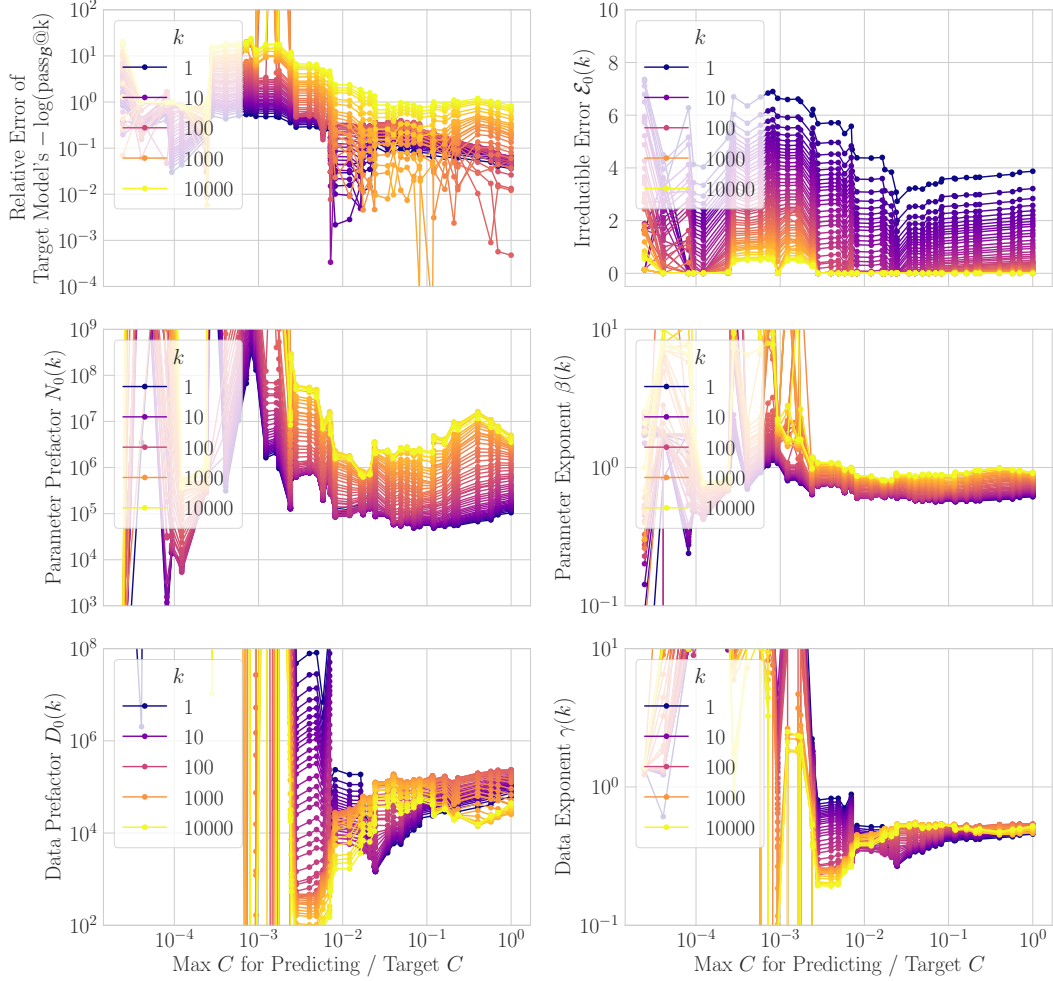


Figure 10: **Predicting Pass Rates from Scaling Parameters and Tokens (Backtesting).** We evaluated how accurately the parameters + tokens scaling law (Eqn. 3) predicts the most expensive model’s $-\log(\text{pass}_B@k)$. **Top Left:** The relative error decreases as higher-compute checkpoints are included, plateauing once the fit includes models within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target. **Other Five Panels:** The estimates of the five scaling law parameters are initially unstable but converge to their full-fit values once included models are within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target.

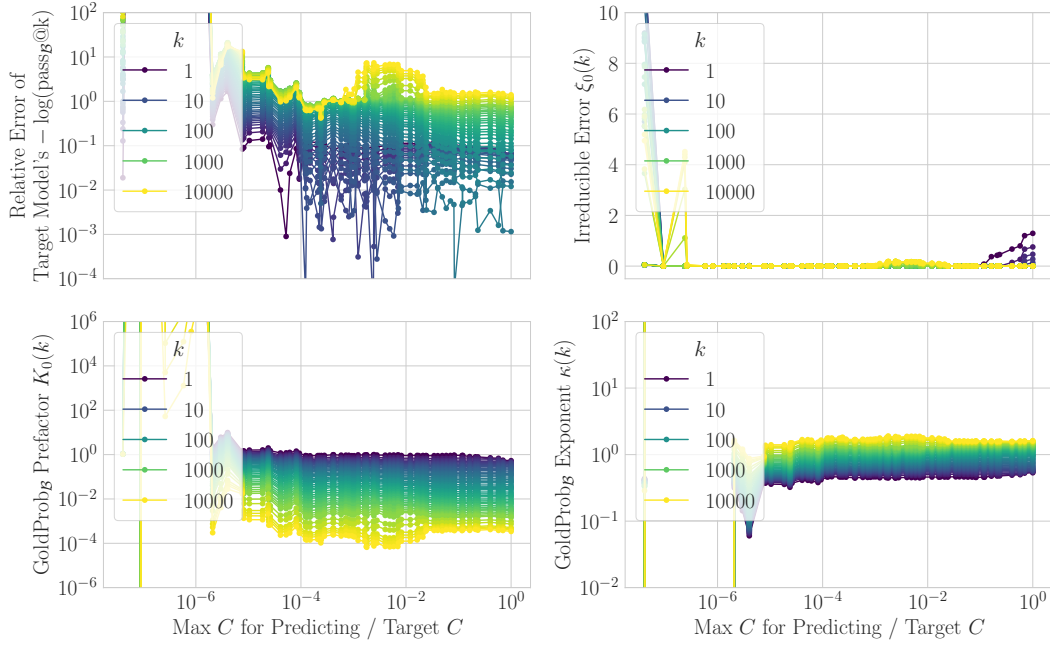


Figure 11: Predicting Pass Rates from Gold Reference Likelihoods (Backtesting). While the overall predictive error is comparable to the other laws, it is slightly lower for small k and slightly higher for large k . **Top Left:** The most striking result is the exceptional stability of the scaling law’s parameters. In stark contrast to the compute and parameters+tokens laws, whose parameters stabilized only when fit on models within ~ 2 orders of magnitude of the target, the backtested estimates for $\hat{\xi}_0(k)$, $\hat{K}_0(k)$, and $\hat{\kappa}(k)$ converge to their final values using models up to ~ 5 orders of magnitude cheaper than the target. **Other Three Panels:** This remarkable stability suggests that the relationship between gold reference likelihoods and pass rates provides a robust signal, enabling reliable, long-range forecasts from much cheaper models.