

## Extraterrestrial neighbors? Our galaxy contains over 30 intelligent civilizations, new calculations suggest

In 1961 the astronomer Frank Drake proposed what became known as [the Drake equation](#), setting out seven factors that would need to be known to come up with an estimate for the number of intelligent civilisations out there. These factors ranged from the the average number of stars that form each year in the galaxy through to the timespan over which a civilisation would be expected to be sending out detectable signals.

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Now [astrophysicist Christopher] Conselice and colleagues [report in the Astrophysical Journal](#) how they refined the equation with new data and assumptions to come up with their estimates.

“Basically, we made the assumption that intelligent life would form on other [Earth-like] planets like it has on Earth, so within a few billion years life would automatically form as a natural part of evolution,” said Conselice.

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Under the strictest set of assumptions – where, as on Earth, life forms between 4.5bn and 5.5bn years after star formation – there are likely between four and 211 civilisations in the Milky Way today capable of communicating with others, with 36 the most likely figure. But Conselice noted that this figure is conservative, not least as it is based on how long our own civilisation has been sending out signals into space – a period of just 100 years so far.

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