A finite-state automaton (FSA), or finite-state machine (FSM), is a series of states and transitions between states.

- By moving through the FSA, you try to match an input string.
- The idea is that you can move from state to state, when conditions on the arcs are met.
  
  e.g. Move from state 0 to state 1 if I encounter the letter c. (Otherwise, do nothing.)

We represent states with nodes (circles) and transitions with arcs (arrows) in a picture.¹

The FSA above matches (or generates) the string color or the string colour.

- The double lines around node 6 means that this is a final state = can end at this state.
- You have to be in a final state when you’re done, or it fails—if you match color, you are not done.

¹Note that the numbers on the nodes are just for our convenience; they don’t really “mean” anything.
Now, the following FSA is similar, but subtly different. How is it different?

What does the following FSA do?

Note:

- You have to have a single start node, but you can have more than one end node.
- The nodes don’t necessarily have to go in order from left to right.
- FSAs are what are used to match regular expressions. Logically, they are equivalent.

Let’s draw FSAs which recognize the following regular expressions:

- /aer\^m/ 
- /a(b|p)er+m/