Introduction to algorithms
The set-intersection problem

Lecture 2
September 3rd 2004

Algorithms
• A systematic and unambiguous procedure that produces - in a finite number of steps - the answer to a question or the solution of a problem
• An algorithm has an input:
  – Example ?
  – Sometimes, the algorithm works only if the input satisfies some conditions (pre-conditions).
    These need to be specified clearly!!!
    • Examples?
• An algorithm has an output:
  – The solution to the problem (hopefully!)
    • Examples?

What is a good algorithms?
• Correctness:
  – Ideally: always returns the right answer
  – When the problem is too hard, we want the algo to
    • Return the right answer most of the time, or
    • Returns an answer that is guaranteed to be close to the right answer
• Speed: Time it takes to solve the problem
• Space: Amount of memory required
• Simplicity:
  – Easy to understand and analyze
  – Easy to implement
  – Easy to debug, modify, update

Running time
• How to measure the speed of an algorithm?
• Problem #1: Running time depends on the size of input.
  – intersecting two big lists takes more time than two small ones
• Solution:
  – Describe running time as a function of input size
Examples:
To compute the average of a set of $n$ numbers, the running time may be $T(n) = 123 * n + 0.3$ microseconds.
To compute the intersection of a list of $m$ students with a list of $n$ students, the running time may be $T(m, n) = 234 \cdot n \log(n) + 53 \log(n) + 123$.

Running time (2)
Problem #2:
Running time depends not only on the size of the input but sometimes also on the content of the input itself (called the instance of the problem)
Example: For the list-intersection problem, an algorithm may be fast on (Alice, Bob, Carl, Don) vs (Alice, Bob, Carl, Don)
but it may be slow on (Alice, Bob, Carl, Don) vs (Don, Carl, Bob, Alice)

Running time (3)
Three possibilities to measure running time
• Best case: Time on the easiest input of fixed size.
  – Usually meaningless
• Average case: Time on average input
  – Good measure, but very hard to calculate.
  – “Average” according to what input distribution?
• Worst case: Time on most difficult input
  – Good for safety critical systems: airplane traffic control
  – Easier to estimate
Languages for describing algorithms

- **English Prose:**
  To find the maximum element of an array, initialize \( m \) to the value of the first element. Then, for each subsequent element, if that element is larger than \( m \), replace \( m \) with the value of that element. Return the value of \( m \).

- **Binary language:**
  \[01010101101100110101010011010100101010101010010101010101001010101010101001011001011001010101011010101010100101010101010010101010010110\]

- **Programming language (Java, C...)**
  ```java
  int findMax(int A[], int n) {
    int m = A[0];
    for (int i = 1; i < n; i++)
      if (m < A[i]) m = A[i];
    return m;
  }
  ```

Pseudo-code

- **Universal language to describe algorithms to human, independent of the programming language**
- **Has common constructs like**
  - Assignments: \( x \leftarrow x + 1 \)
  - Conditionals: if \( (x = 0) \) then \( \ldots \)
  - Loops: for \( i \leftarrow 0 \) to \( n \) do \( \ldots \)
  - Objects and function calls: \( \text{triangle.getArea()} \)
  - Mathematical notation: \( x \leftarrow \lfloor y/2 \rfloor \)
  - Blocks, indicated by indentation

**Algorithm findMax(A, n)**

**Input:** An array \( A \) of \( n \) numbers

**Output:** The largest element of the array

```java
for i = 0 to n-1 do {
  if (m < A[i]) m = A[i];
}
return m;
```

List-intersection problem

- **Input:**
  - The names of a set of students taking COMP250
  - The names of a set of students taking MATH240.
  - **Assumption:** No two students have the same name
- **Question:**
  - How many students are taking both classes?
  - How do I minimize the number of times I need to compare two names?

**Solution 1 – Nested for-loops**

**Algorithm ListIntersection(A,m, B,n)**

**Input:** An array \( A \) of \( m \) strings and an array \( B \) of \( n \) strings. The elements of \( A \) and \( B \) are assumed to be distinct.

**Output:** The number of elements present in both \( A \) and \( B \)

```java
inter = 0
for i = 0 to m-1 do {
  for j = 0 to n-1 do {
    if (A[i] = B[j]) {
      inter = inter + 1
    }
  }
}
return inter
```

**Solution 2 – Binary search**

**Algorithm sort(A,n)**

**Input:** An array \( A \) of \( n \) elements.

**Output:** The array sorted in increasing order

```java
left = 0
right = n
while (right > left + 1) do {
  mid = (left + right) / 2
  if (A[mid] < k) then right = mid
  else left = mid
}
if (A[left] = k) then return True;
else return False;
```

**Algorithm listIntersection(A,m, B,n)**

**Input:** same as before

**Output:** same as before

```java
inter = 0
B = sort (B,n)
for i = 0 to m-1 do {
  if (binarySearch(B, n, A[i]) then {
    inter = inter + 1
  }
}
return inter
```
Solution 2 – Binary search

Algorithm sort(A,n)
Input: An array A of n elements.
Output: The array sorted in increasing order (Assumed to be given)

Algorithm binarySearch(A,n, k)
Input: A sorted array A of n elements. A key k
Output: True if A contains k, False otherwise

left ← 0
right ← n
while (right > left+1) do
    mid ← ⌊(left+right)/2⌋
    if (A[mid] > k) then
        right ← mid
    else
        left ← mid
    if (A[left] = k) then return True;
    else return False;

Number of comparisons: \( \lfloor n \log_2(n) \rfloor \) We’ll see why next month...

This loop makes \( \lfloor \log_2(n) \rfloor \) name comparisons

Solution 3 – Binary search

Algorithm listIntersection(A,m, B,n)
Input: Same as before
Output: Same as before
inter ← 0
B ← sort (B,n)
for i ← 0 to m-1 do
    if binarySearch(B, n, A[i]) then
        inter ← inter+1
    return inter

\( \lfloor n \log_2(n) \rfloor \) comparisons

m* (\( \lfloor \log_2(n) \rfloor +1 \) comparisons

Total number of comparisons: \( n \lfloor \log_2(n) \rfloor + m + m \lfloor \log_2(n) \rfloor + m \)

Solution 4: Sorting and parallel pointers

Algorithm listIntersection(A,m, B,n)
Input: Same as before
Output: Same as before
inter ← 0
A ← sort (A,m)
B ← sort (B,n)
PtrA ← 0
PtrB ← 0
while (ptrA < m and ptrB < n) do
    if (A[ptrA] = B[ptrB]) then
        inter ← inter+1
        ptrA ← ptrA+1
        ptrB ← ptrB+1
    else if (A[ptrA] < B[ptrB]) ptrA ← ptrA+1
    else ptrB ← ptrB+1
return inter

Worst case: the two lists are disjoint: \( (m+n) \times 2 \) comps.

Total: \( m \lfloor \log_2(m) \rfloor + n \lfloor \log_2(n) \rfloor + m + n -1 \)

Summary

- Algorithms can be described at different levels. Pseudo-code is appropriate for human
- Many algorithms exist for solving any problem.
- For big inputs, good algorithms and data structures make a BIG difference