COMP251: Running time analysis and the Big O notation

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Based on slides from M. Langer and M. Blanchette
Outline

• Motivations
• The Big O notation
  o Definition
  o Examples
  o Rules
• Big Omega and Big Theta
• Applications
Measuring the running “time”

• Goal: Analyze an algorithm written in pseudocode and describe its running time
  – Without having to write code
  – In a way that is independent of the computer used

• To achieve that, we need to
  – Make simplifying assumptions about the running time of each basic (primitive) operations
  – Study how the number of primitive operations depends on the size of the problem solved
**Primitive Operations**

Simple computer operation that can be performed in time that is always the same, independent of the size of the bigger problem solved (we say: constant time)

- **Assigning a value to a variable:** \( x \leftarrow 1 \)
- **Calling a method:** `Expos.addWin()`
  - Note: doesn’t include the time to execute the method
- **Returning from a method:** `return x;`
- **Arithmetic operations on primitive types**
  \( x + y, r*3.1416, x/y, \) etc.
- **Comparisons on primitive types:** `x==y`
- **Conditionals:** `if (...) then.. else...`
- **Indexing into an array:** `A[i]`
- **Following object reference:** `Expos.losses`

**Note:** Multiplying two Large Integers is *not* a primitive operation, because the running time depends on the size of the numbers multiplied.
Algorithm findMin(A, start, stop)
Input: Array A, index start & stop
Output: Index of the smallest element of A[start:stop]

minvalue ← A[start]
minindex ← start
index ← start + 1
while ( index <= stop ) do {
  if (A[index]<minvalue) then {
    minvalue ← A[index]
    minindex ← index
  }
  index = index + 1
}
return minindex

Running time

- \( T_{\text{index}} + T_{\text{assign}} \)
- \( T_{\text{assign}} \)
- \( T_{\text{arith}} + T_{\text{assign}} \)
- \( T_{\text{comp}} + T_{\text{cond}} \)
- \( T_{\text{index}} + T_{\text{comp}} + T_{\text{cond}} \) (repeated)
- \( T_{\text{index}} + T_{\text{assign}} \)
- \( T_{\text{assign}} \)
- \( T_{\text{arith}} + T_{\text{assign}} \)
- \( T_{\text{comp}} + T_{\text{cond}} \) (last check of loop)
- \( T_{\text{return}} \)
Worst case running time

• Running time depends on \( n = \text{stop} - \text{start} + 1 \)
  – But it also depends on the content of the array!
• What kind of array of \( n \) elements will give the worst running time for findMin?

Example: 5 4 3 2 1 0

• The best running time?

Example: 0 1 2 3 4 5
More assumptions

• Counting each type of primitive operations is tedious

• The running time of each operation is roughly comparable:

\[ T_{assign} \approx T_{comp} \approx T_{arith} \approx \ldots \approx T_{index} = 1 \text{ primitive operation} \]

• We are only interested in the number of primitive operations performed

Worst-case running time for findMin becomes:

\[ T(n) = 8 + 10 \times (n-1) \]

8 primitive operations outside the loop 10 primitive operations inside the loop
Selection Sort

**Algorithm** SelectionSort(A,n)  
**Input:** an array A of n elements  
**Output:** the array is sorted  

i← 0  
while (i<n) do {  
  minindex ← findMin(A,i,n-1)  
  t ← A[minindex]  
  A[i] ← t  
  i ← i + 1  
}  

Primitive operations (worst case):  
1  
2  
3 + T_{\text{FindMin}}(n-1-i+1)=3 + (10 (n-i) - 2)  
2 (last check of loop condition)

Selection sort builds a sorted list by casting findMin on the unsorted region and swapping
Selection Sort: adding it up

Total: $T(n) = 1 + \left( \sum_{i=0}^{n-1} 12 + 10 (n - i) \right) + 2$

$= 3 + \left( 12 n + 10 \sum_{i=0}^{n-1} (n-i) \right)$

$= 3 + 12 n + 10 \left( \sum_{i=0}^{n-1} n \right) - 10 \left( \sum_{i=0}^{n-1} i \right)$

$= 3 + 12 n + 10 n * n - 10 ( (n-1)*n ) / 2)$

$= 3 + 12 n + 10 n^2 - 5 n^2 + 5 n$

$= 5 n^2 + 17 n + 3$

You can take the time to go through the math later, here the main idea is that we can sum up all the individual operations to estimate the running time.
More simplifications

We have: \( T(n) = 5n^2 + 17n + 3 \)

**Simplification #1:**
When \( n \) is large, \( T(n) \approx 5n^2 \)

**Simplification #2:**
When \( n \) is large, \( T(n) \) grows approximately like \( n^2 \)
We will write \( T(n) \) is \( O(n^2) \)
“\( T(n) \) is big O of \( n \) squared”

is?
Asymptotic behavior
Towards a formal definition of big O

Let $t(n)$ be a function that describes the time it takes for some algorithm on input size $n$.

We would like to express how $t(n)$ grows with $n$, as $n$ becomes large i.e. asymptotic behavior.

Unlike with limits, we want to say that $t(n)$ grows like certain simpler functions such as $\sqrt{n}, \log_2 n, n, n^2, 2^n$ ...

Think about this as categorizing algorithms by running time “classes”
Preliminary Definition

Let \( t(n) \) and \( g(n) \) be two functions, where \( n \geq 0 \). We say \( t(n) \) is asymptotically bounded above by \( g(n) \) if there exists \( n_0 \) such that, for all \( n \geq n_0 \),

\[
\quad t(n) \leq g(n)
\]

WARNING: This is not yet a formal definition!
for all \( n \geq n_0 \), \( t(n) \leq g(n) \)
Example

\[ 5n + 70 \]

\[ 6n \]
Example

Claim: $5n + 70$ is asymptotically bounded above by $6n$.

Proof:
(State definition) We want to show there exists an $n_0$ such that, for all $n \geq n_0$, $5 \cdot n + 70 \leq 6 \cdot n$.

$$5n + 70 \leq 6n$$
$$\iff 70 \leq n$$

Thus, we can use $n_0 = 70$

Symbol “$\iff$” means “if and only if” i.e. logical equivalence
Choosing a function and constants

Which of these should we use as our upper bound?
Motivation

We would like to express formally how some function $t(n)$ grows with $n$, as $n$ becomes large.

We would like to compare the function $t(n)$ with simpler functions, $g(n)$, such as $\sqrt{n}, \log_2 n, n, n^2, 2^n$ ...
Formal Definition

Let $t(n)$ and $g(n)$ be two functions, where $n \geq 0$.

We say $t(n)$ is $O(g(n))$ if there exists two positive constants $n_0$ and $c$ such that, for all $n \geq n_0$,

$$t(n) \leq c \cdot g(n)$$

Note: $g(n)$ will be a simple function, but this is not required in the definition.
"\( f(n) \) is \( O(g(n)) \)" if and only if there exists a point \( n_0 \) beyond which \( f(n) \) is less than some fixed constant times \( g(n) \).

\[
\text{For all } n \geq n_0 \\
f(n) \leq c \cdot g(n) \quad (\text{for } c = 1)
\]
Example (1)

Claim: $5 \cdot n + 70$ is $O(n)$
Proof(s)

Claim: $5 \cdot n + 70$ is $O(n)$

Remember last class: just substitute in something easy to deal with

Proof 1: $5 \cdot n + 70 \leq 5 \cdot n + 70 \cdot n = 75 \cdot n$, if $n \geq 1$

Thus, take $c = 75$ and $n_0 = 1$.

Proof 2: $5 \cdot n + 70 \leq 5 \cdot n + 6 \cdot n = 11 \cdot n$, if $n \geq 12$

Thus, take $c = 11$ and $n_0 = 12$.

Proof 3: $5 \cdot n + 70 \leq 5 \cdot n + n = 6 \cdot n$, if $n \geq 70$

Thus, take $c = 6$ and $n_0 = 70$.

All these proofs are correct and show that $5 \cdot n + 70$ is $O(n)$
All three upper bounds can be used to prove $5n + 70$ is $O(n)$
Example (2)

**Claim:** $8 \cdot n^2 - 17 \cdot n + 46$ is $O(n^2)$.

**Proof 1:** $8n^2 - 17n + 46 \leq 8n^2 + 46n^2$, if $n \geq 1$

$\leq 54n^2$

Thus, we can take $c = 54$ and $n_0 = 1$.

**Proof 2:** $8n^2 - 17n + 46 \leq 8n^2$, if $n \geq 3$

Thus, we can take $c = 8$ and $n_0 = 3$. 

What does O(1) mean?

We say $t(n)$ is $O(1)$, if there exist two positive constants $n_0$ and $c$ such that, for all $n \geq n_0$.

$$t(n) \leq c$$

So, it just means that $t(n)$ is bounded.
Tips

Never write $O(3n), O(5 \log_2 n), etc.$

Instead, write $O(n), O(\log_2 n), etc.$

**Why?** The point of the big O notation is to avoid dealing with constant factors. It’s technically correct but we don’t do it, since that would defeat the point of using big O notation.

If you want to describe an exact upper bound, you can simply say a function is bounded above by another.
Other considerations

• $n_0$ and $c$ are not uniquely defined. For a given $n_0$ and $c$ that satisfies $O()$, we can increase one or both to again satisfy the definition. There is not “better” choice of constants.

• However, we generally want a “tight” upper bound (asymptotically), so functions in the big O gives us more information (Note: This is not the same as smaller $n_0$ or $c$). For instance, $f(n)$ that is $O(n)$ is also $O(n^2)$ and $O(2^n)$. But $O(n)$ is more informative.

If you think of big O complexities as classes, this makes sense!
Growth of functions

Tip: It is helpful to memorize the relationship between basic functions.
Practical meaning of big O...

<table>
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<th>n</th>
<th>constant</th>
<th>logarithmic</th>
<th>linear</th>
<th>N-log-N</th>
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<th>cubic</th>
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<tr>
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<td>O(log n)</td>
<td>O(n)</td>
<td>O(n log n)</td>
<td>O(n^2)</td>
<td>O(n^3)</td>
<td>O(2^n)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>384</td>
<td>4,069</td>
<td>262,144</td>
<td>1.84 x 10^{19}</td>
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</table>

If the unit is in seconds, this would make ~10^{11} years...
Constant Factor rule

Suppose $f(n)$ is $O(g(n))$ and $a$ is a positive constant. Then, $a \cdot f(n)$ is also $O(g(n))$

**Proof:** By definition, if $f(n)$ is $O(g(n))$ then there exists two positive constants $n_0$ and $c$ such that for all $n \geq n_0$,

$$f(n) \leq c \cdot g(n)$$

Thus,

$$a \cdot f(n) \leq a \cdot c \cdot g(n)$$

We use the constant $a \cdot c$ to show that $a \cdot f(n)$ is $O(g(n))$.

Multiplying a function by a constant does not change its Big O upper bound since these upper bounds ignore constants.
Sum rule

Suppose $f_1(n)$ is $O(g(n))$ and $f_2(n)$ is $O(g(n))$. Then, $f_1(n) + f_2(n)$ is $O(g(n))$.

**Proof:** Let $n_1$, $c_1$ and $n_2$, $c_2$ be constants such that

\[
f_1(n) \leq c_1 g(n), \text{ for all } n \geq n_1
\]

\[
f_2(n) \leq c_2 g(n), \text{ for all } n \geq n_2
\]

So, $f_1(n) + f_2(n) \leq (c_1 + c_2) g(n)$, for all $n \geq \max(n_1, n_2)$.

We can use the constants $c_1 + c_2$ and $\max(n_1, n_2)$ to satisfy the definition.

A sum of two functions is inferior to a sum of two greater functions
Generalized Sum rule

Suppose \( f_1(n) \) is \( O(g(n)) \) and \( f_2(n) \) is \( O(g(n)) \). Then, \( f_1(n) + f_2(n) \) is \( O(g_1(n) + g_2(n)) \).

**Proof:** Exercise...

Simply generalized the idea from the previous proof.
Share your answer on Ed!
Product Rule

Suppose \( f_1(n) \) is \( O(g(n)) \) and \( f_2(n) \) is \( O(g(n)) \). Then, \( f_1(n) \cdot f_2(n) \) is \( O(g_1(n) \cdot g_2(n)) \).

**Proof:** Let \( n_1, c_1 \) and \( n_2, c_2 \) be constants such that

\[
f_1(n) \leq c_1 g_1(n), \quad \text{for all } n \geq n_1
\]

\[
f_2(n) \leq c_2 g_2(n), \quad \text{for all } n \geq n_2
\]

So, \( f_1(n) \cdot f_2(n) \leq (c_1 \cdot c_2) \cdot (g_1(n) \cdot g_2(n)) \), for all \( n \geq \max(n_1, n_2) \).

We can use the constants \( c_1 \cdot c_2 \) and \( \max(n_1, n_2) \) to satisfy the definition.

A product of two functions is less than a product of two greater functions.
Transitivity Rule

Suppose $f(n) \in O(g(n))$ and $g(n) \in O(h(n))$. Then, $f(n) \in O(h(n))$.

**Proof:** Let $n_1, c_1$ and $n_2, c_2$ be constants such that

\[ f(n) \leq c_1 g(n), \text{ for all } n \geq n_1 \]

\[ g(n) \leq c_2 h(n), \text{ for all } n \geq n_2 \]

So, $f(n) \leq (c_1 \cdot c_2) h(n)$, for all $n \geq \max(n_1, n_2)$.

We can use the constants $c_1 \cdot c_2$ and $\max(n_1, n_2)$ to satisfy the definition.

If a function A is greater than function B, and function B is greater than function C, then function A is greater than function C.
Notations

If $f(n)$ is $O(g(n))$, we often write $f(n) \in O(g(n))$. That is a member of the functions that are $O(g(n))$.

For $n$ sufficiently large we have, $1 < \log_2 n < n < n \log_2 n \ldots$
And we write $O(1) \subset O(\log_2 n) \subset O(n) \subset O(n \log_2 n) \ldots$

Strict subset of
The Big Omega notation ($\Omega$)

Let $t(n)$ and $g(n)$ be two functions with $n \geq 0$.

We say $t(n)$ is $\Omega(g(n))$, if there exists two positive constants $n_0$ and $c$ such that, for all $n \geq n_0$,

$$t(n) \geq c \cdot g(n)$$

Note: This is the opposite of the big $O$ notation. The function $g$ is now used as a "lower bound".
Example

Claim: \( \frac{n(n-1)}{2} \) is \( \Omega(n^2) \).

Proof: We show first that \( \frac{n(n-1)}{2} \geq \frac{n^2}{4} \).

\[ \iff 2n(n - 1) \geq n^2 \]
\[ \iff n^2 \geq 2n \]
\[ \iff n \geq 2 \]

Thus, we take \( c = \frac{1}{4} \) and \( n_0 = 2 \).

(Exercise: Prove that it also works with \( c = \frac{1}{3} \) and \( n_0 = 3 \).)
Intuition
And... big Theta!

Let $t(n)$ and $g(n)$ be two functions, where $n \geq 0$.
We say $t(n)$ is $\Theta(g(n))$ if there exists three positive constants $n_0$ and $c_1, c_2$ such that, for all $n \geq n_0$,

$$c_1 \cdot g(n) \leq t(n) \leq c_2 \cdot g(n)$$

Note: if $t(n)$ is $\Theta(g(n))$. Then, it is also $O(g(n))$ and $\Omega(g(n))$. 
Example

Let $t(n) = 4 + 17 \log_2 n + 3n + 9n \log_2 n + \frac{n(n-1)}{2}$

**Claim:** $t(n)$ is $\Theta(n^2)$

**Proof:**

$$\frac{n^2}{4} \leq t(n) \leq (4 + 17 + 3 + 9 + \frac{1}{2}) \cdot n^2$$
Big vs. little

The big $O$ (resp. big $\Omega$) denotes a tight upper (resp. lower) bounds, while the little $o$ (resp. little $\omega$) denotes a loose upper (resp. lower) bounds.
The time it takes for an algorithm to run depends on:

- constant factors (often implementation dependent)
- the size $n$ of the input
- the values of the input, including arguments if applicable...

Q: What are the best and worst cases?
Example (Binary Search)

**Best case:** The value is exactly in the middle of the array.

\[ \Rightarrow \Omega(1) \]

**Worst case:** You recursively search until you reach an array of size 1 (Note: It does not matter if you find the key or not).

\[ \Rightarrow O(\log_2 n) \]

Can we compute the Big Theta of Binary search?

(from Wikipedia)
Important dates

• First assignment will come out in late September
• Assignments due roughly every two weeks in October and November.
• Office hours start next week (see course website)
• You will get a break for the midterm (late October)
• Tutorials will come out late September