

# CSC 421: Algorithm Design & Analysis

Spring 2019

## analyzing problems

- lower bounds on problems  
brute force arguments, information theoretic arguments  
decision trees, adversary arguments
- problem reduction

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## Analyzing problems

for most of this class, we have focused on devising algorithms for a given problem, then analyzing those algorithms

selection sort a list of numbers  $\rightarrow O(N^2)$

find shortest path between  $v_1$  &  $v_2$  in a graph (Dijkstra's)  $\rightarrow O(V^2)$

does that mean sorting & path finding are equally hard problems?

we know of a more efficient algorithm for sorting

merge sort  $\rightarrow O(N \log N)$

does that mean it is an easier problem?

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## Proving lower bounds

to characterize the difficulty of a problem (not a specific algorithm), must be able to show a lower bound on possible algorithms

- can be shown that comparison-based sorting requires  $\Omega(N \log N)$  steps
- similarly, shortest path for an undirected graph requires  $\Omega(E + V \log V)$  steps

establishing a lower bound for a problem can tell us

- when a particular algorithm is as good as possible
- when the problem is intractable (by showing that best possible algorithm is BAD)

methods for establishing lower bounds:

- brute force
- information-theoretic arguments (decision trees)
- adversary arguments
- problem reduction

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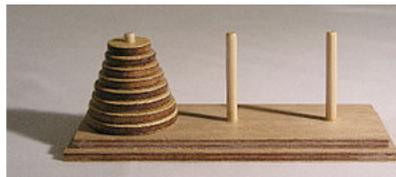
## Brute force arguments

sometimes, a problem-specific approach works

example: polynomial evaluation

$$p(N) = a_N x^N + a_{N-1} x^{N-1} + \dots + a_0$$

- evaluating this polynomial requires  $\Omega(N)$  steps, since each coefficient must be processed



example: Towers of Hanoi puzzle

- can prove, by induction, that moving a tower of size  $N$  requires  $\Omega(2^N)$  steps

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## Information-theoretic arguments

can sometimes establish a lower bound based on the amount of information the solution must produce

example: guess a randomly selected number between 1 and N

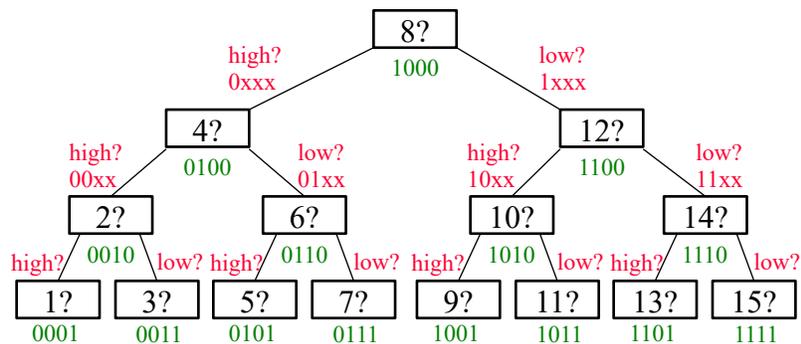
- with possible responses of "correct", "too low", or "too high"
- the amount of uncertainty is  $\lceil \log_2 N \rceil$ , the number of bits needed to specify the selected largest number  
e.g.,  $N = 127 \rightarrow 7$  bits
- each answer to a question yields at most 1 bit of information  
if guess of 64 yields "too high," then 1<sup>st</sup> bit must be a 0  $\rightarrow 0xxxxx$   
if next guess of 32 yields "too low," then 2<sup>nd</sup> bit must be 1  $\rightarrow 01xxxx$   
if next guess of 48 yields "too low," then 3<sup>rd</sup> bit must be 1  $\rightarrow 011xxxx$   
...
- thus,  $\lceil \log_2 N \rceil$  is a lower bound on the number of questions

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## Decision trees

a useful structure for information-theoretic arguments is a *decision tree*

example: guessing a number between 1 and 15



min # of nodes in the decision tree? min height of binary tree with that many nodes?

this problem is  $\Omega(\text{minimal decision tree height}) \rightarrow \Omega(\log N)$

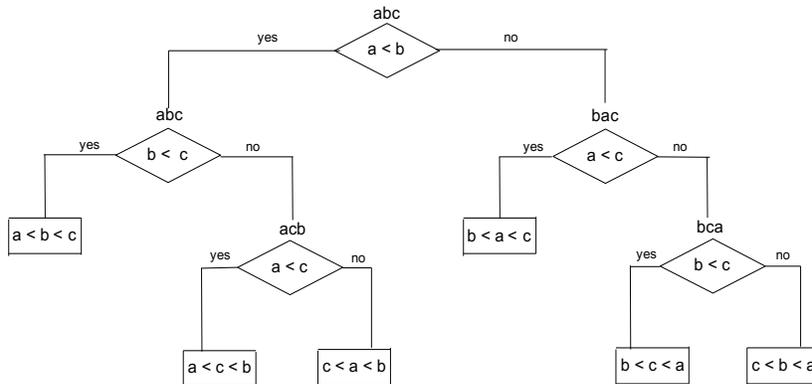
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## Decision trees

in general, a *decision tree* is a model of an algorithm involving comparisons

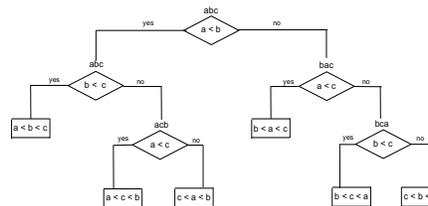
- internal nodes represent comparisons
- leaves represent outcomes

e.g., decision tree for 3-element (comparison-based) sort:



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## Decision trees & sorting



note that any comparison-based sorting algorithm can be represented by a decision tree

- number of leaves (outcomes)  $\geq N!$
- height of binary tree with  $N!$  leaves  $\geq \lceil \log_2 N! \rceil$
- therefore, the minimum number of worst-case comparisons required by any comparison-based sorting algorithm  $\geq \lceil \log_2 N! \rceil$
- since  $\lceil \log_2 N! \rceil \approx N \log_2 N$  (proof not shown),  $\Omega(N \log N)$  steps are required

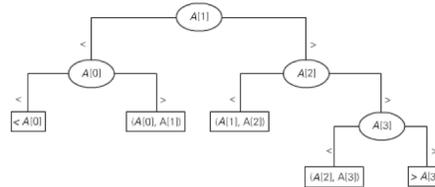
thus, merge/quick/heap sorts are as good as it gets

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## Decision trees & searching

similarly, we can use a decision tree to show that binary search is as good as it gets (assuming the list is sorted)

decision tree for binary search  
of 4-element list:



- internal nodes are found elements
- leaves are ranges if not found

- number of leaves (ranges where not found) =  $N + 1$
- height of binary tree with  $N+1$  leaves  $\geq \lceil \log_2(N+1) \rceil$
- therefore, the minimum number of comparisons required by any comparison-based searching algorithm  $\geq \lceil \log_2(N+1) \rceil$
- $\Omega(\log N)$  steps are required

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## Adversary arguments

using an *adversary argument*, you repeatedly adjust the input to make an algorithm work the hardest

example: dishonest hangman

- adversary always puts the word in a larger of the subset generated by last guess
- for a given dictionary, can determine a lower bound on guesses

example: merging two sorted lists of size  $N$  (as in merge sort)

- adversary makes it so that no list "runs out" of values (e.g.,  $a_i < b_j$  iff  $i < j$ )
- forces  $2N-1$  comparisons to produce  $b_1 < a_1 < b_2 < a_2 < \dots < b_N < a_N$

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## Problem reduction

*problem reduction uses a transform & conquer approach*

- if we can show that problem  $P$  is at least as hard as problem  $Q$ , then a lower bound for  $Q$  is also a lower bound for  $P$ .

i.e.,  $\text{hard}(P) \geq \text{hard}(Q) \rightarrow$  if  $Q$  is  $\Omega(X)$ , so is  $P$

*in general, to prove lower bound for  $P$ :*

1. find problem  $Q$  with a known lower bound
2. reduce that problem to problem  $P$   
i.e., show that can solve  $Q$  by solving an instance of  $P$
3. then  $P$  is at least as hard as  $Q$ , so same lower bound applies

*example: prove that multiplication (of  $N$ -bit numbers) is  $\Omega(N)$*

1. squaring an  $N$ -bit number is known to be  $\Omega(N)$
2. can reduce squaring to multiplication:  $x^2 = x * x$
3. then multiplication is at least as hard as squaring, so also  $\Omega(N)$

*REASONING: if multiplication could be solved in  $O(X)$  where  $X < N$ , then could do  $x^2$  by doing  $x*x \rightarrow O(X) < O(N)$  CONTRADICTION OF SQUARE'S  $\Omega(N)$*

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## Problem reduction example

**CLOSEST NUMBERS (CN) PROBLEM:** given  $N$  numbers, find the two closest numbers

1. consider the ELEMENT UNIQUENESS (EU) problem
  - given a list of  $N$  numbers, determine if all are unique (no dupes)
  - this problem has been shown to have a lower bound of  $\Omega(N \log N)$
2. can reduce EU to CN  
consider an instance of EU: given numbers  $e_1, \dots, e_N$ , determine if all are unique
  - find the two closest numbers (this is an instance of CN)
  - if the distance between them is  $> 0$ , then  $e_1, \dots, e_N$  are unique
3. this shows that CN is at least as hard as EU
  - can solve an instance of EU by performing a transformation & solving CN
  - since transformation is  $O(N)$ , CN must also have a lower-bound of  $\Omega(N \log N)$

*REASONING: if CN could be solved in  $O(X)$  where  $X < N \log N$ , then could solve EU by transforming & solving CN  $\rightarrow O(N) + O(X) < O(N \log N)$*

*CONTRADICTION OF EU'S  $\Omega(N \log N)$*

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## Another example

CLOSEST POINTS (CP) PROBLEM: given  $N$  points in the plane, find the two closest points

1. consider the CLOSEST NUMBER (CN) problem
  - we just showed that CN has a lower bound of  $\Omega(N \log N)$
2. can reduce CN to CP
  - consider an instance of CN: given numbers  $e_1, \dots, e_N$ , determine closest numbers
    - from these  $N$  numbers, construct  $N$  points:  $(e_1, 0), \dots, (e_N, 0)$
    - find the two closest points (this is an instance of CP)
    - if  $(e_i, 0)$  and  $(e_j, 0)$  are closest points, then  $e_i$  and  $e_j$  are closest numbers
3. this shows that CP is at least as hard as CN
  - can solve an instance of CN by performing a transformation & solving CP
  - since transformation is  $O(N)$ , CP must also have a lower-bound of  $\Omega(N \log N)$

*REASONING: if CP could be solved in  $O(X)$  where  $X < N \log N$ ,  
then could solve CN by transforming & solving CP  $\rightarrow O(N) + O(X) < O(N \log N)$   
CONTRADICTION OF CN's  $\Omega(N \log N)$*

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## Tightness

note: if an algorithm is  $\Omega(N \log N)$ , then it is also  $\Omega(N)$

are the  $\Omega(N \log N)$  lower bounds tight for CLOSEST NUMBERS and CLOSEST POINTS problems?

- can you devise  $O(N \log N)$  algorithm for CLOSEST NUMBERS?
- can you devise  $O(N \log N)$  algorithm for CLOSEST POINTS?

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