

Flow Free Solver

A solver for Flow Free puzzles using *back tracking* search for CSPs.

The problem

Boards are typically a square grid with any number of colors to connect. A *well-designed* board (an assumption made by this solver) has a unique solution, and requires the entire board to be filled in without any “zig-zagging” paths. A consequence of being an NP-complete puzzle is that, although solutions can be verified quickly, there is no known efficient algorithm to find a solution, and the time required to solve the problem increases very quickly as the board size grows. How do we leverage a computer to quickly find the solution to a given board? We can devise a metric to score potential paths towards the solution, and we investigate the paths that maximize this function first.

Approaches

These are approaches we took to solve these puzzles, few notes need to be taken before reading. We consider the map as matrix where each element in this matrix is a *variable* and these variables are coordinates in xy plan, where y grows downwards starting from the top left corner. Assignments are stored in a dictionary-styled data structure where keys are coordinates and values are colors for each coordinate, we use uppercase letters for terminals and lowercase for pipes.

Constraints

These are the procedures we took to check the consistency of any new assignments.

Is_good_combination

What we mean by good combination here the state of the selected assignment don't/won't cause any problems. we can wrap them up in the following table

Number of free neighbors	Number of similar neighbors	is good combination
2 or higher	Not needed	True
1	1	True
Otherwise		False

`Is_neighbors_terminals_have_valid_path`

Checks whether or not any neighboring terminal is *locked out*, in other words if our newly assigned `var : value` causes any problem.

`Is_terminal_connected`

Use the cached on demand updated terminals to check if the same `value` terminals are already connected, because if so, it doesn't make sense to assign that value to a variable again

Dumb algorithm

Picking a random value and random variable each time check whether or not this assignment is consistent. If it was consistent move to the next assignment in a *DFS-styled* backtracking.

Solution:

5x5:

This algorithm worked flawlessly with 5x5 input

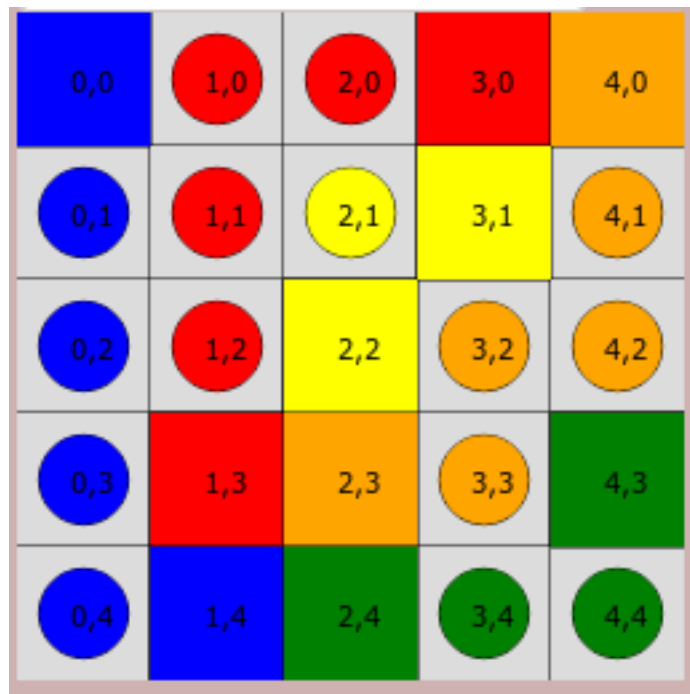


Figure 1: 5x5 solution graphical

```
map ../input/input55.txt solution time = 0.0074388980865478516 sec  
BrrR0  
bryYo  
brYoo  
bR0oG  
bBGgg
```

7x7 and higher:

TimeOut!

Smart Algorithm

Results

Dumb algorithm

Smart Algorithm

Getting started