2475. Number of Unequal Triplets in Array

Easy | Array | Hash Table

Problem Description

You are provided with an array of positive integers called `nums`. Each element of the array has a 0-based index. The task is to find out how many groups of three indices `(i, j, k)` exist such that the following conditions are met:

1. The indices are in strictly increasing order, i.e., `i < j < k`.
2. The values of `nums` at these indices are pairwise distinct. This means that `nums[i]`, `nums[j]`, and `nums[k]` should all be different from each other.

In other words, for a triplet `(i, j, k)` to be counted, it must consist of three unique numbers from the `nums` array, each coming from a unique position in the array, where `i`, `j`, and `k` represent the positions (indices) of these numbers.

The goal is to return the count of all such triplets.

Intuition

To solve this problem, we need to find a way to calculate the number of distinct triplets without having to manually check each possible combination, which would be inefficient especially for large arrays.

We can use the following approach:

1. Count the frequency of each number in the array using a data structure like a dictionary (`Counter` in Python).
2. Iterate through each unique number's frequency, calculating how many distinct triplets can be formed with it.

The intuition stems from the fact that if we know how many times a particular number occurs, and how many numbers are before and after it in the array (that haven't been used in a triplet yet), we can calculate all the valid triplets it can form.

Here are the steps taken in the solution code:

- Use `Counter` to get the frequency of each distinct number in `nums`.
- Initialize two counters, `ans` and `a`. `ans` will hold the final count of triplets, and `a` will keep track of the count of numbers processed so far.
- Loop through the frequency count of each distinct number:
  - Let `b` represent the frequency of the current number.
  - Calculate `c` as the number of remaining elements that come after the current number, which is `n - a - b` (where n is the total length of `nums`).
  - The number of triplets we can form with the current number as the middle element is `a * b * c`. This product comes from selecting one of the numbers before the current one (`a` choices), the current number itself (`b` choices), and one of the numbers after (`c` choices).
  - Add this triplet count to the `ans`.
  - Update `a` to include the current number as well by adding `b` to it.
- The final answer is contained in `ans`, so we return it.

Solution Approach

The solution approach is based on the concept of counting and combinatorics. To implement the solution, the following components are used:

- **Data Structures:**
  - We use the `Counter` class from Python's `collections` module to efficiently count the frequency of each element in the `nums` array.
  - A dictionary-like container maps unique elements to their respective frequencies.
- **Variables:**
  - `cnt`: A `Counter` object that holds the frequency of each unique element in `nums`.
  - `n`: The total number of elements in `nums`.
  - `ans`: An accumulator to sum the number of valid triplets found.
  - `a`: Keeps track of the number of elements processed so far (left side of the current element).
  - `b`: The frequency of the current element being considered as the middle element of a triplet.
  - `c`: Represents the number of elements that are available to be picked after the current element.
- **Algorithm:**
  1. Count the frequency of each unique number using `cnt = Counter(nums)`.
  2. Initialize a variable `ans` to accumulate the total number of valid triplets and a variable `a` to keep track of the count of numbers already processed.
  3. Iterate over each count `b` in the values of `cnt` (since keys represent the unique numbers and values their respective counts):
     - Calculate the number of available elements after the current element (which could potentially be the third element of the triplet) as `c = n - a - b`.
     - Calculate the number of triplets possible with the current number as the middle element as `a * b * c` and add this to `ans`.
     - Update `a` to include the element just processed by adding `b` to it.
  4. After the loop ends, `ans` holds the total number of valid triplets, which is returned as the final answer.

Each step of the algorithm is designed to avoid checking each triplet individually by leveraging the frequency counts and positions of numbers to calculate the number of potential triplets directly. This leads to a more efficient implementation that can handle large arrays without incurring a performance penalty typical of brute-force solutions.

Example Walkthrough

Let's consider an example `nums` array to illustrate the solution approach:

```
nums = [1, 1, 2, 2, 3]
```

From the problem statement, we want to count distinct triplets `(i, j, k)` such that `nums[i]`, `nums[j]`, and `nums[k]` are all unique.

1. First, we use `Counter` to get the frequency of each unique number in `nums`.

```python
from collections import Counter
cnt = Counter(nums)  # cnt will be Counter({1: 2, 2: 2, 3: 1})
```

2. We set `n` to the total number of elements in `nums`, which is `5`.

3. Initialize the variables `ans` for the total number of valid triplets and `a` for counting processed numbers.

```python
ans = 0
a = 0
```

4. Now, we iterate over each count `b` in the values of `cnt`. The dictionary `cnt` has elements along with their frequencies: `{1: 2, 2: 2, 3: 1}`.
   - First iteration (for number 1):
     - `b` for number 1 is `2`.
     - `c = n - a - b` which is `5 - 0 - 2 = 3`. There are three elements that can come after the first `1` to form a triplet.
     - Triplet count for `1` is `a * b * c = 0 * 2 * 3 = 0` (since `a` is 0, no triplets can be formed with 1 as the middle element yet).
     - Update `a = a + b` to `2` (since we've now processed two occurrences of 1).
   - Second iteration (for number 2):
     - `b` for number 2 is `2`.
     - `c = n - a - b` which is `5 - 2 - 2 = 1`. There is one element that can come after `2` to form a triplet.
     - Triplet count for `2` is `a * b * c = 2 * 2 * 1 = 4`. We can form 4 triplets with `2` as the middle element.
     - Update `ans` by adding the triplet count, `ans = ans + 4` to `4`.
     - Update `a = a + b` to `4` (as we've now processed two occurrences of 2).
   - Third iteration (for number 3):
     - `b` for number 3 is `1`.
     - `c = n - a - b` which is `5 - 4 - 1 = 0`. There are no elements left to form triplets with `3` as the middle element.
     - Triplet count for `3` is `a * b * c = 4 * 1 * 0 = 0`. No additional triplets can be formed.
     - `ans` remains `4`.
5. After the iteration ends, `ans` holds the total number of valid triplets. For this example, there are 4 valid triplets, and thus we return `4`.

To conclude, using this example with `nums = [1, 1, 2, 2, 3]`, the algorithm efficiently found the total number of 4 distinct triplets without having to check each possible combination of three numbers.

Solution Implementation

Python

```python
from collections import Counter

class Solution:
    def unequalTriplets(self, nums: List[int]) -> int:
        # Count the frequency of each number in nums
        number_counts = Counter(nums)
        total_numbers = len(nums)

        # Initialize the answer and the count for the first number in the triplet
        answer = count_first_number = 0

        # Iterating through the counts of each unique number
        for count_second_number in number_counts.values():
            # Count of the third number in the triplet is total_numbers
            # minus the count_first_number and count_second_number
            count_third_number = total_numbers - count_first_number - count_second_number

            # Calculate the number of triplets where the first, second, and third numbers
            # are all different
            answer += count_first_number * count_second_number * count_third_number

            # Increment count_first_number for the next iteration of the loop
            count_first_number += count_second_number

        # Return the total number of unequal triplets
        return answer
```

Java

```java
class Solution {
    public int unequalTriplets(int[] nums) {
        // Create a map to store the frequency of each number in the array
        Map<Integer, Integer> frequencyMap = new HashMap<>();
        for (int num : nums) {
            // If the number is already in the map, increment its frequency,
            // otherwise insert it with frequency 1
            frequencyMap.merge(num, 1, Integer::sum);
        }

        // Initialize the answer variable to store the count of unequal triplets
        int answer = 0;

        // Variable 'prefixCount' is used to keep track of the count of numbers processed so far
        int prefixCount = 0;

        // 'n' is the total number of elements in the input array
        int n = nums.length;

        // Iterate through the frequency map
        for (int frequency : frequencyMap.values()) {
            // Calculate the count of numbers remaining after excluding the current number
            int suffixCount = n - prefixCount - frequency;

            // Update the answer by adding the number of unequal triplets that can be formed
            answer += prefixCount * frequency * suffixCount;

            // Update the prefix count by adding the frequency of the current number
            prefixCount += frequency;
        }

        // Return the final count of unequal triplets
        return answer;
    }
}
```

C++

```cpp
#include <vector>
#include <unordered_map>
using namespace std;

class Solution {
public:
    // This function counts the number of unequal triplets within the input vector.
    int unequalTriplets(vector<int>& nums) {
        // Create a hash table to keep track of the count of each number in the vector.
        unordered_map<int, int> numCounts;
        // Increment the count for each value in the nums vector.
        for (int value : nums) {
            ++numCounts[value];
        }

        int result = 0;    // Variable to store the result.
        int accumulated = 0; // Accumulated counts of previous numbers.

        // Calculate the number of unequal triplets.
        for (auto& [value, count] : numCounts) {
            int remaining = nums.size() - accumulated - count; // Count of numbers that are not equal to current number.
            result += accumulated * count * remaining; // Multiply by count to form unequal triplets.
            accumulated += count; // Update accumulated with count of the current number.
        }

        // Return the total number of unequal triplets.
        return result;
    }
};
```

TypeScript

```typescript
function unequalTriplets(nums: number[]): number {
    // Find the length of the nums array
    const lengthOfNums = nums.length;
    // Initialize a map to keep count of each number's occurrences
    const countMap = new Map<number, number>();

    // Count the occurrences of each number in the nums array
    for (const num of nums) {
        countMap.set(num, (countMap.get(num) ?? 0) + 1);
    }

    // Initialize variable to hold the result
    let result = 0;
    // 'accumulated' will keep track of the accumulated counts for each processed number
    let accumulated = 0;

    // Iterate over the map to calculate the answer using the formula
    for (const currentCount of countMap.values()) {
        // Calculate the count for the third element in the triplet
        const remaining = lengthOfNums - accumulated - currentCount;
        // Calculate the number of unequal triplets for the current iteration
        result += accumulated * currentCount * remaining;
        // Update the accumulated count
        accumulated += currentCount;
    }

    // Return the total number of unequal triplets
    return result;
}
```

```python
from collections import Counter

class Solution:
    def unequalTriplets(self, nums: List[int]) -> int:
        # Count the frequency of each number in nums
        number_counts = Counter(nums)
        total_numbers = len(nums)

        # Initialize the answer and the count for the first number in the triplet
        answer = count_first_number = 0

        # Iterating through the counts of each unique number
        for count_second_number in number_counts.values():
            # Count of the third number in the triplet is total_numbers
            # minus the count_first_number and count_second_number
            count_third_number = total_numbers - count_first_number - count_second_number

            # Calculate the number of triplets where the first, second, and third numbers
            # are all different
            answer += count_first_number * count_second_number * count_third_number

            # Increment count_first_number for the next iteration of the loop
            count_first_number += count_second_number

        # Return the total number of unequal triplets
        return answer
```

Time and Space Complexity

Time Complexity

The time complexity of the code is primarily determined by the number of operations within the for loop which iterates over the values of the `Counter` object `cnt`. The `Counter` object itself is created by iterating over the `nums` list once, which takes `O(n)` time where `n` is the number of elements in `nums`.

Inside the for loop, each operation is constant time, so the overall time complexity of the for loop is `O(k)`, where `k` is the number of unique elements in `nums`. Since `k` can vary from `1` to `n`, in the worst case where all elements are unique, `k` is equal to `n`.

Therefore, the total time complexity is `O(n) + O(k) = O(n)` as the first iteration to create `Counter` and the second iteration over unique values can be bounded by `n`.

Space Complexity

The space complexity is affected by the storage used for the `Counter` object `cnt` which stores the frequency of each unique element in `nums`. In the worst case, if all elements of `nums` are unique, the `Counter` would take `O(n)` space where `n` is the number of elements in `nums`.

Thus, the overall space complexity of the code is `O(n)`.