Review: Tree search

- Initialize the **frontier** using the **starting state**
- While the frontier is not empty
  - Choose a frontier node to expand according to **search strategy** and take it off the frontier
  - If the node contains the **goal state**, return solution
  - Else **expand** the node and add its children to the frontier

- To handle repeated states:
  - Keep an **explored set**; add each node to the explored set every time you expand it
  - Every time you add a node to the frontier, check whether it already exists in the frontier with a higher path cost, and if yes, replace that node with the new one

Review: Uninformed search strategies

- A **search strategy** is defined by picking the order of node expansion
- **Uninformed** search strategies use only the information available in the problem definition
  - Breadth-first search
  - Depth-first search
  - Iterative deepening search
  - Uniform-cost search

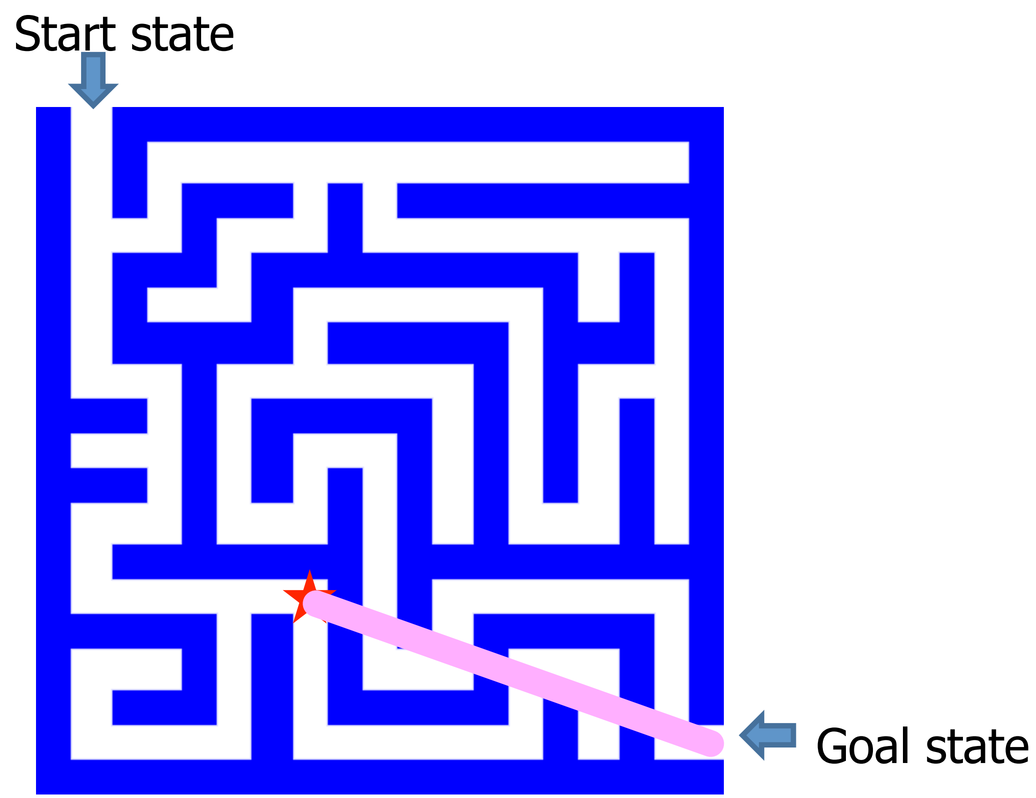
Informed search strategies

- Idea: give the algorithm "hints" about the desirability of different states
  - Use an ***evaluation function*** to rank nodes and select the most promising one for expansion

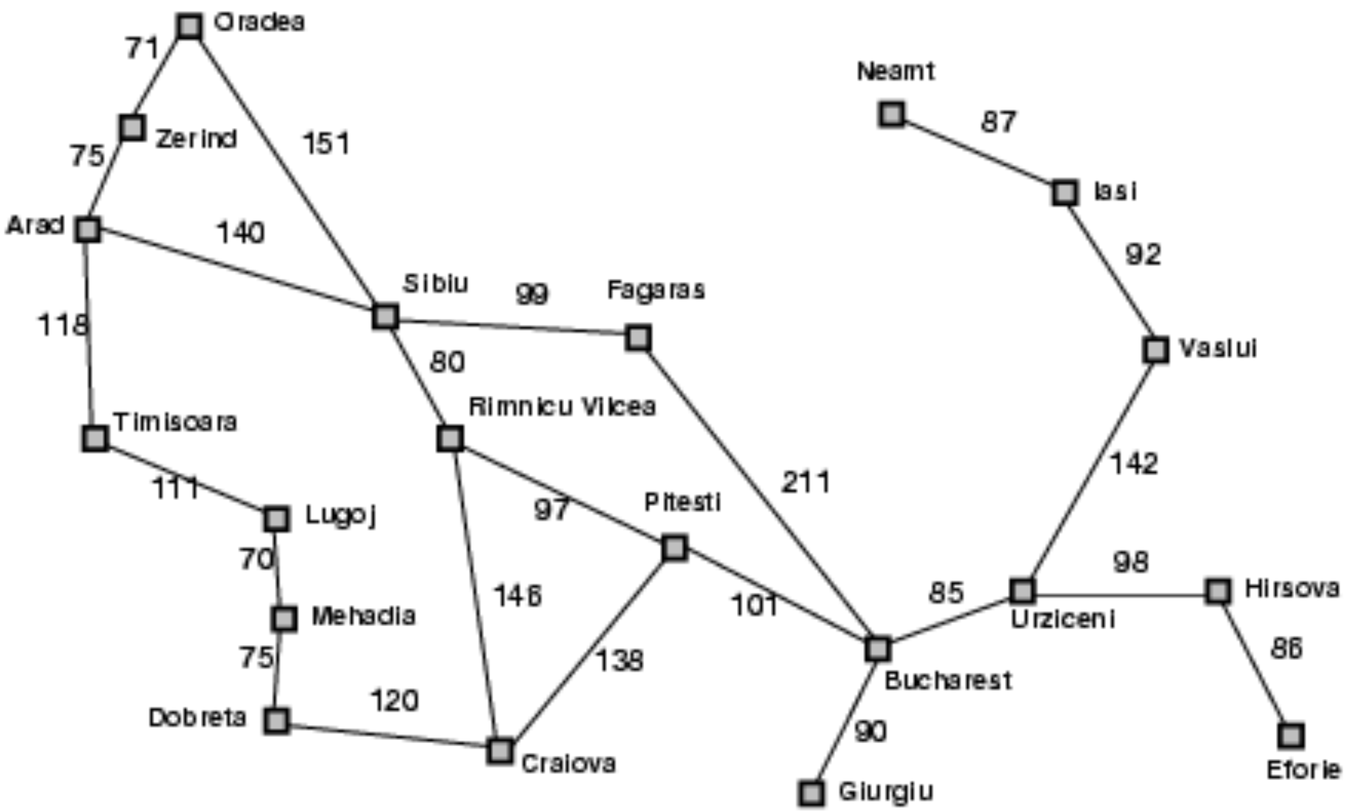
- Greedy best-first search
- A* search

Heuristic function

- **Heuristic function** *h*(*n*) estimates the cost of reaching goal from node *n*
- Example:



Heuristic for the Romania problem



Straight–line distance to Bucharest

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Bucharest	0
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Dobreta	242
Eforie	161
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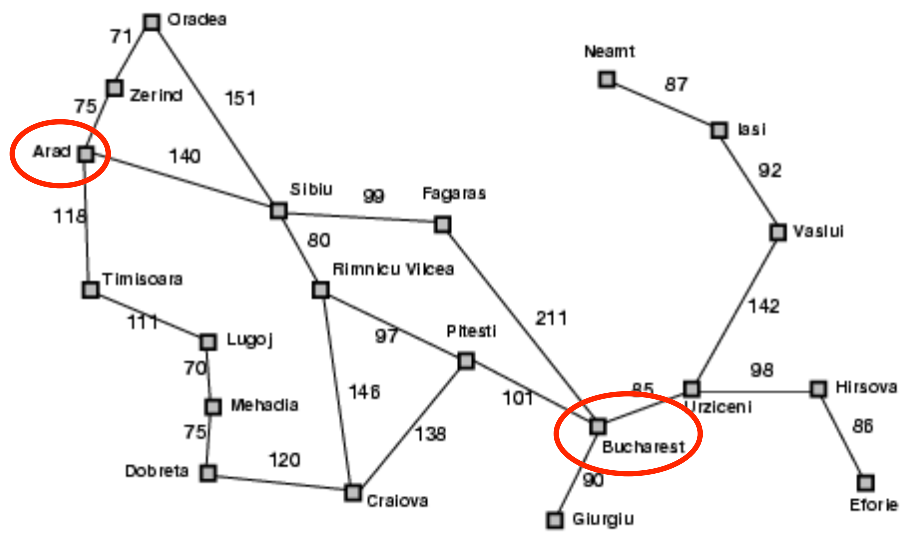
Zerind	374

Greedy best-first search

- Expand the node that has the lowest value of the heuristic function $h(n)$

Greedy best-first search example



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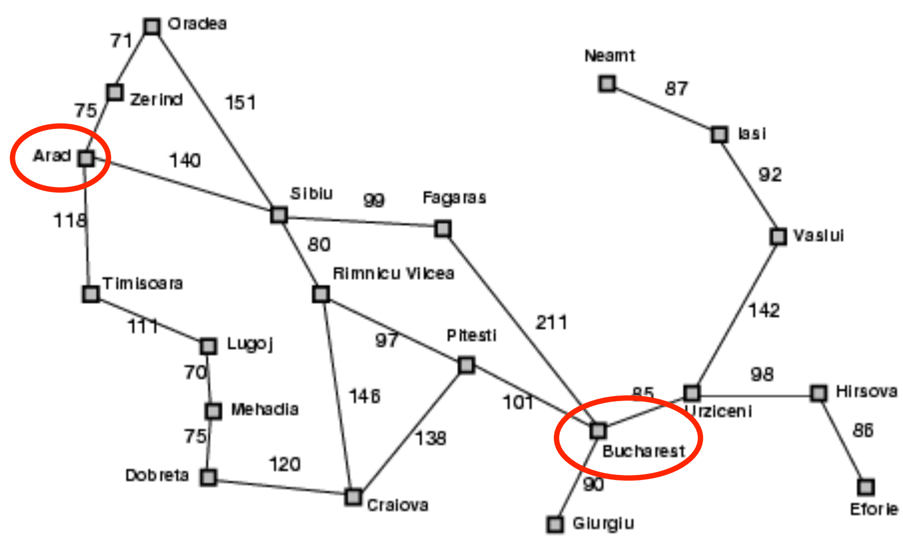

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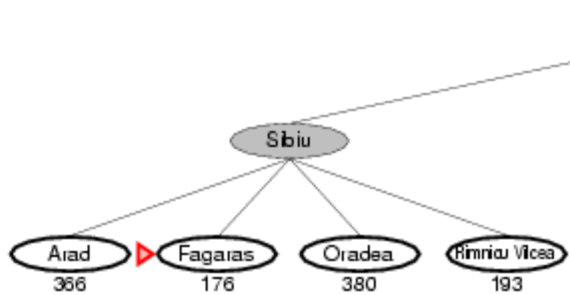

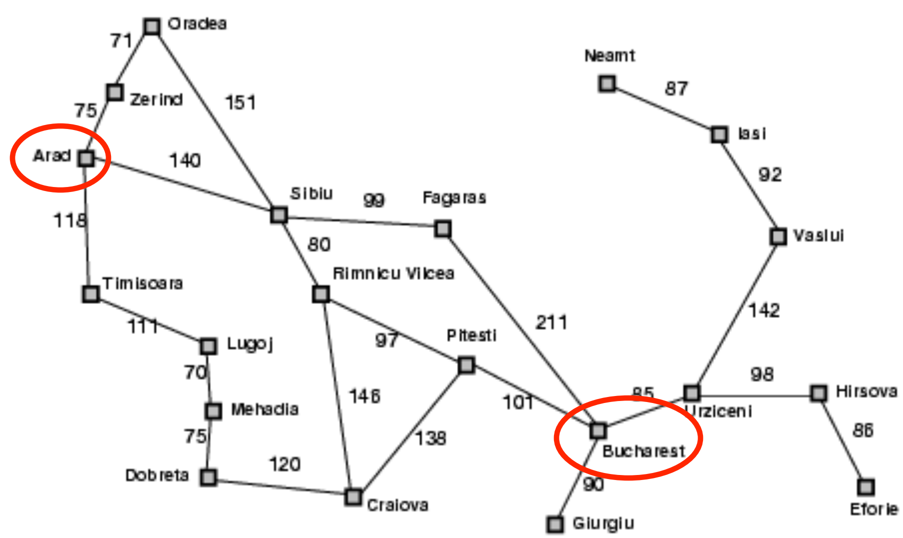

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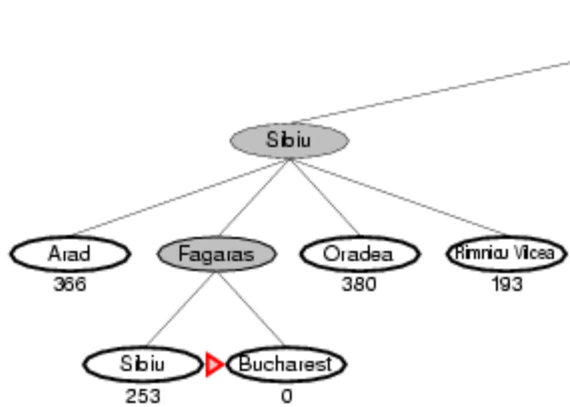
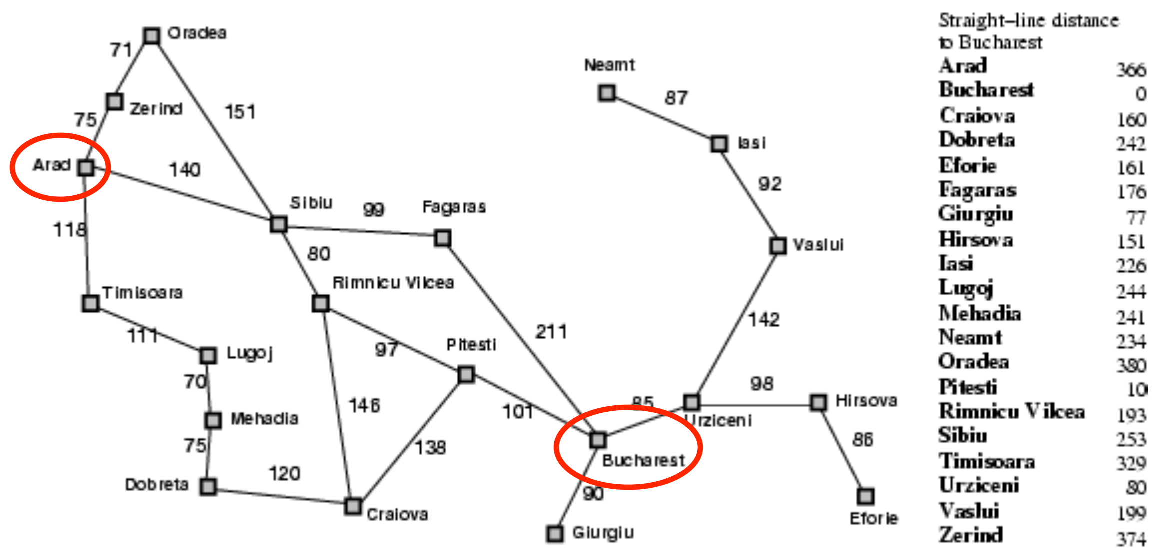
Greedy best-first search example

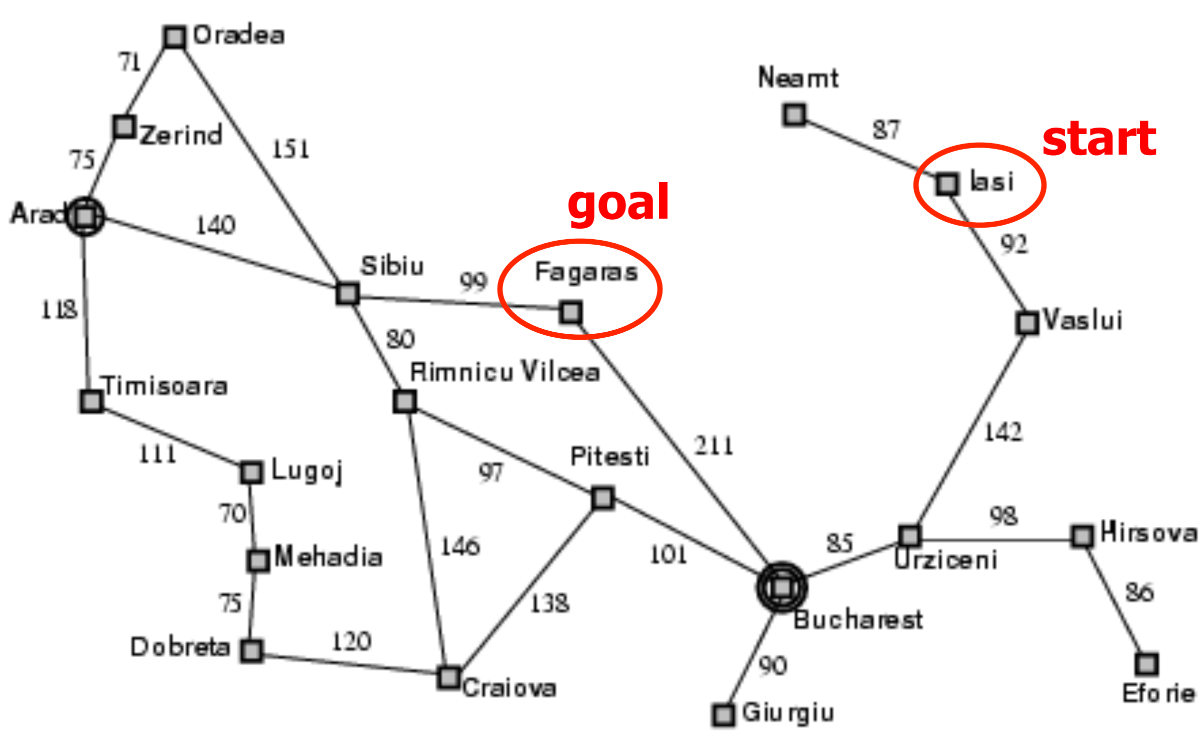




Properties of greedy best-first search

- **Complete?**

  No – can get stuck in loops



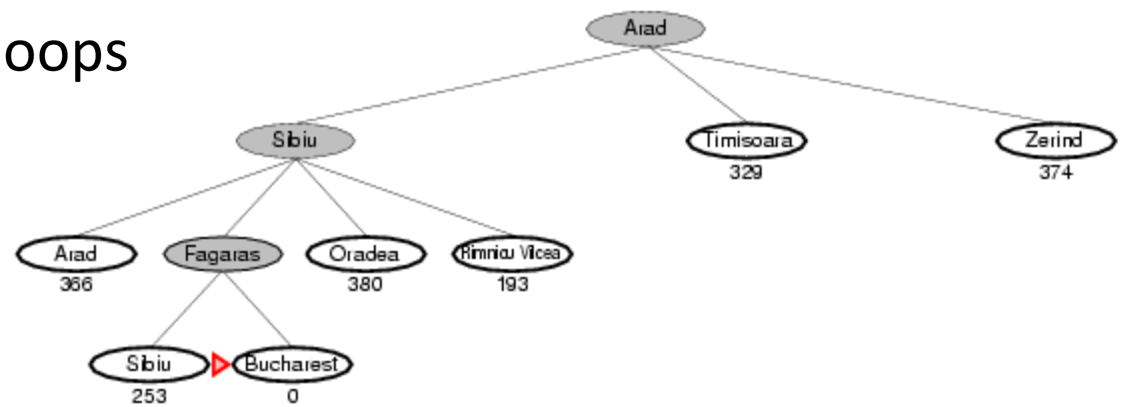
Properties of greedy best-first search

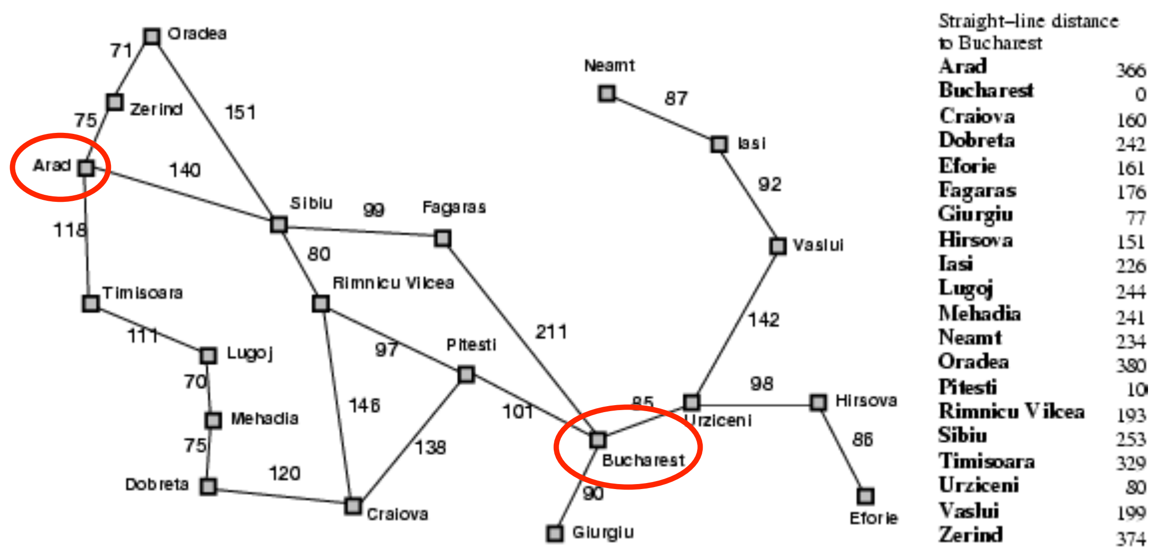
- **Complete?**

  No – can get stuck in loops

- **Optimal?**

  No





Properties of greedy best-first search

- **Complete?**

  No – can get stuck in loops

- **Optimal?**

  No

- **Time?**

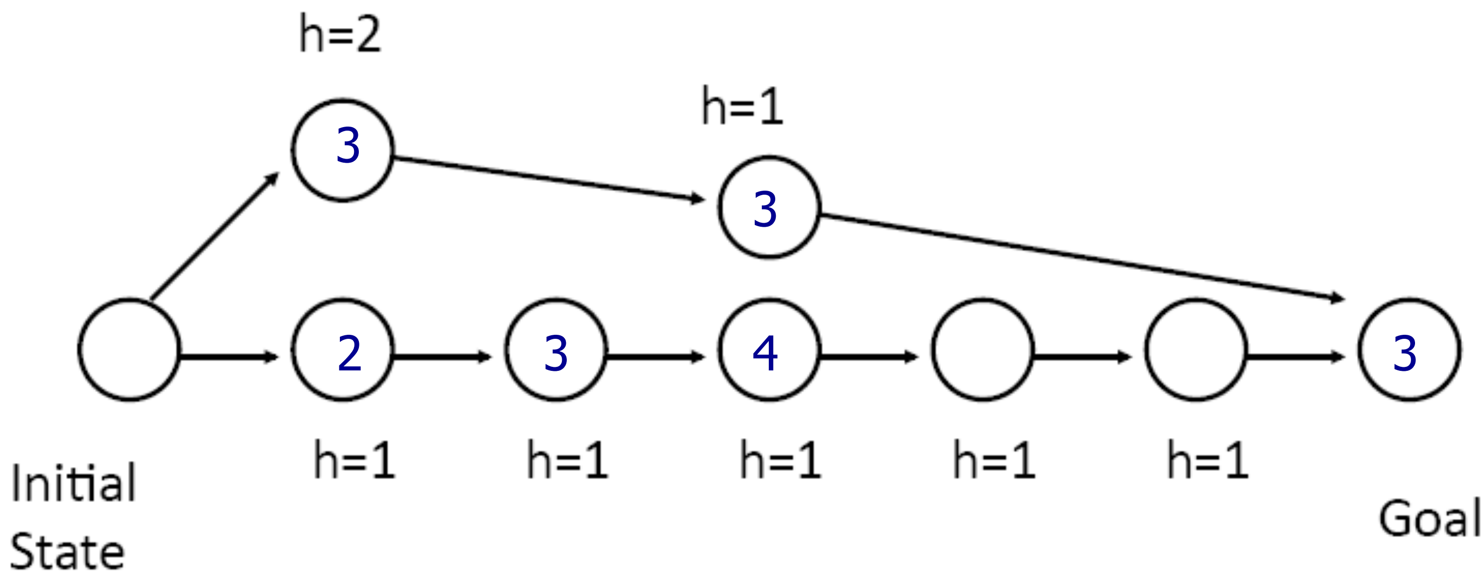
  Worst case: $O(b^m)$

  Can be much better with a good heuristic

- **Space?**

  Worst case: $O(b^m)$

How can we fix the greedy problem?



- How about keeping track of the distance already traveled in addition to the distance remaining?

A^* search

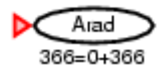
- Idea: avoid expanding paths that are already expensive
- The **evaluation function** $f(n)$ is the estimated total cost of the path through node n to the goal:

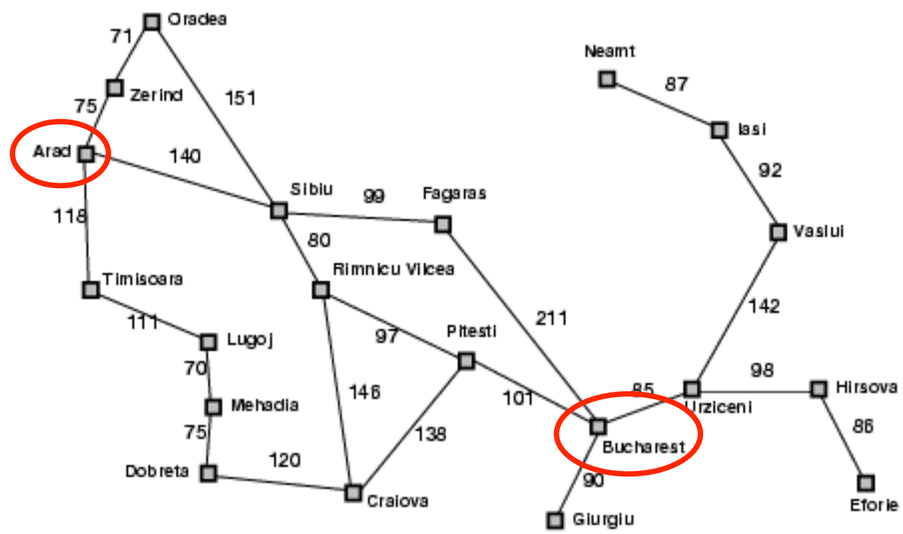
$$f(n) = g(n) + h(n)$$

$g(n)$: cost so far to reach n (path cost)

$h(n)$: estimated cost from n to goal (heuristic)

A* search example





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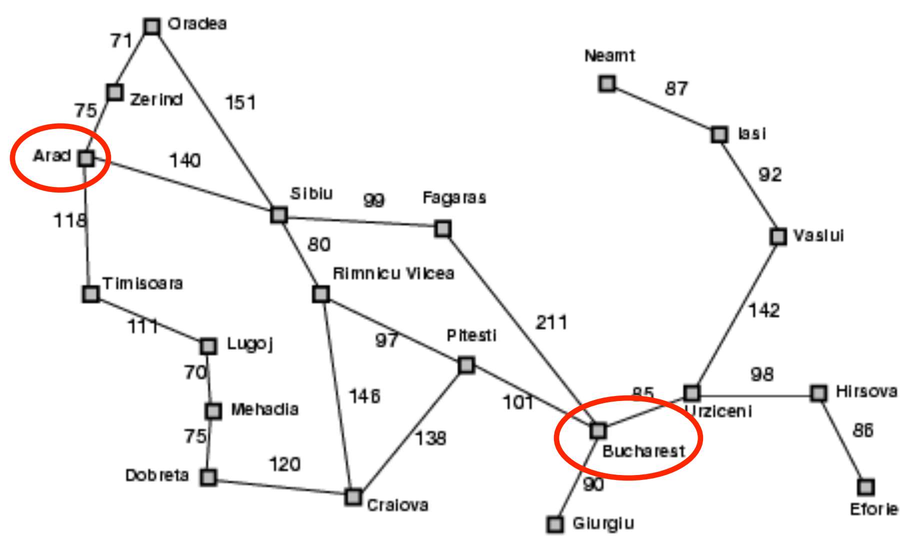

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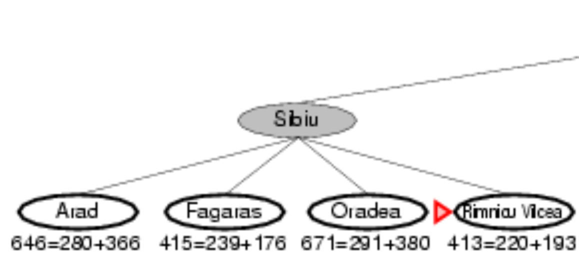
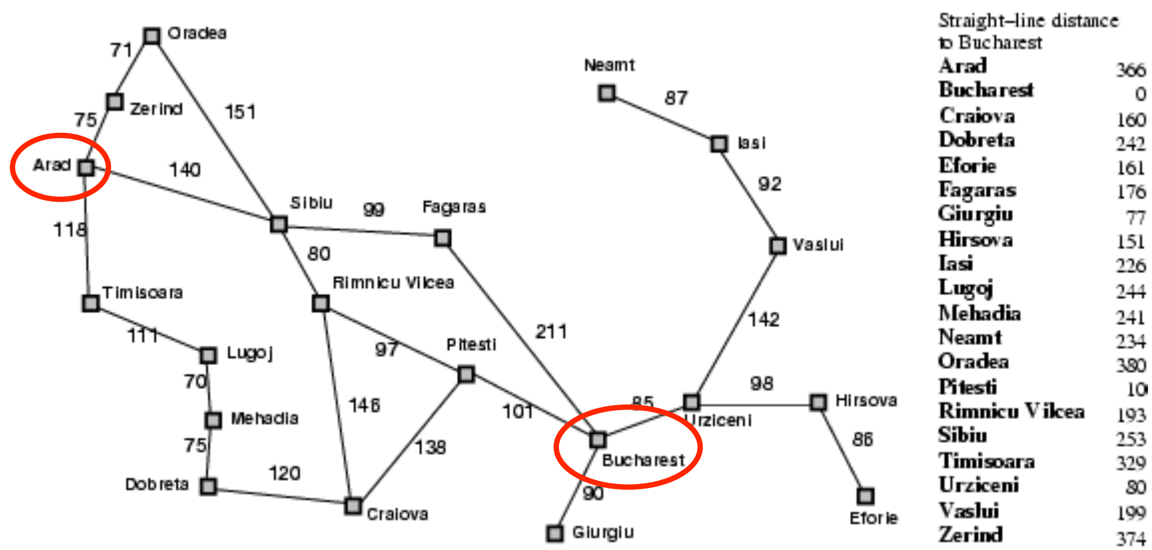
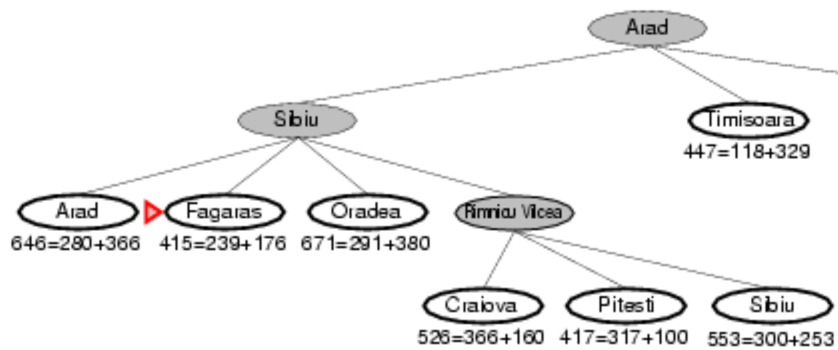
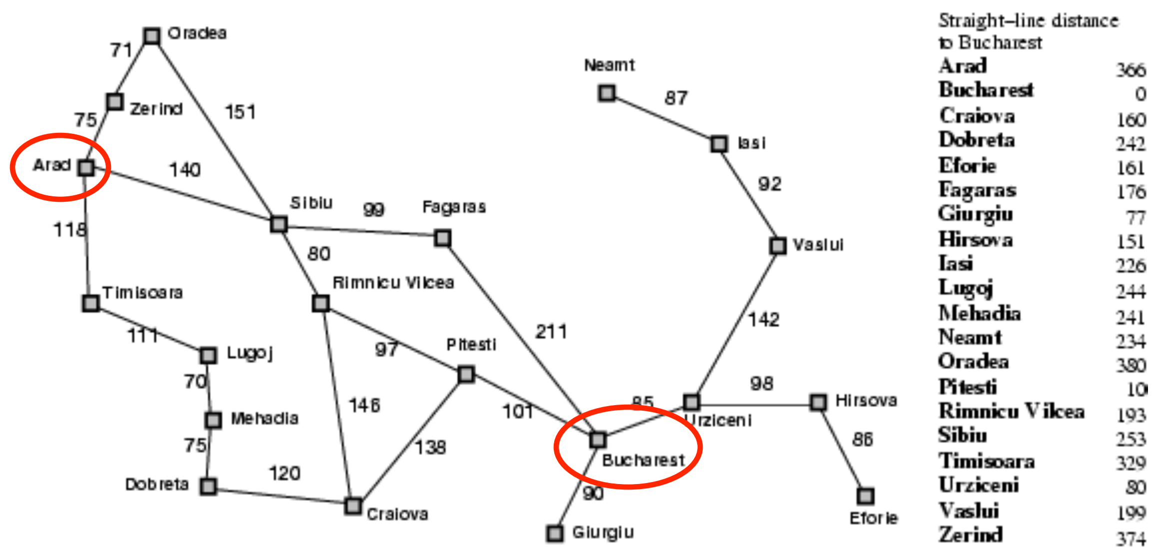
A* search example



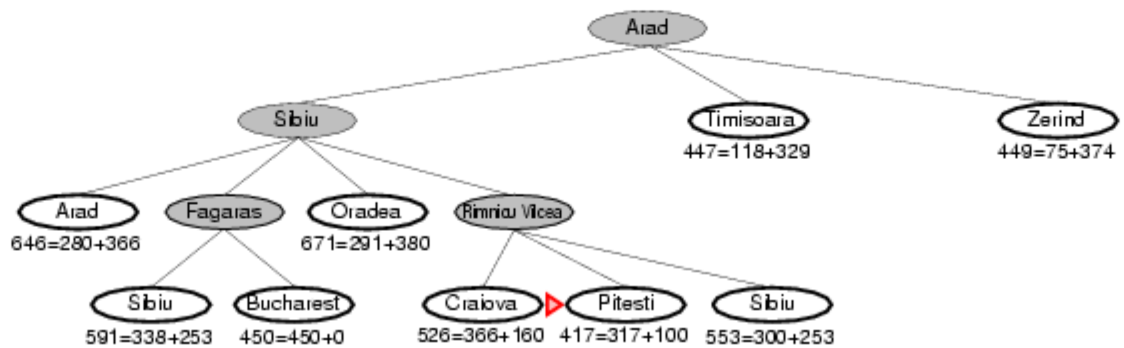


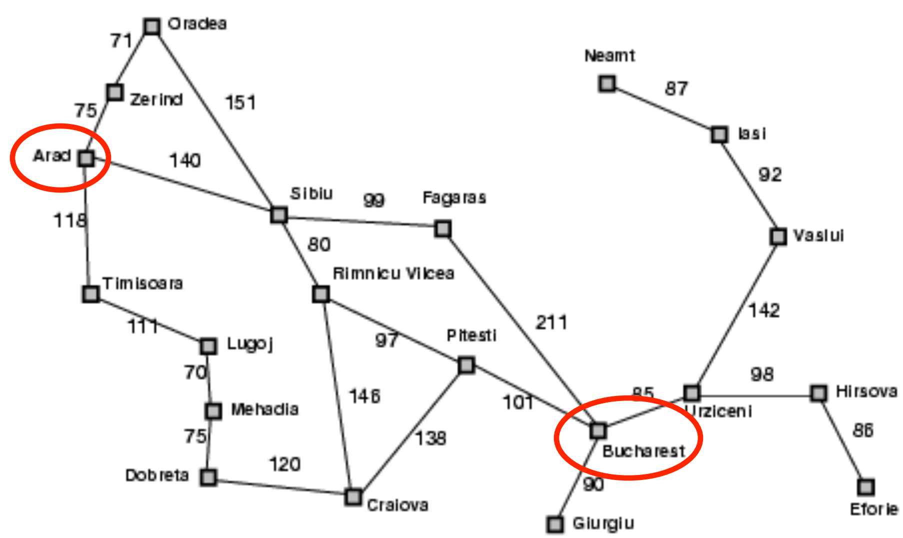
A^* search example





A^* search example





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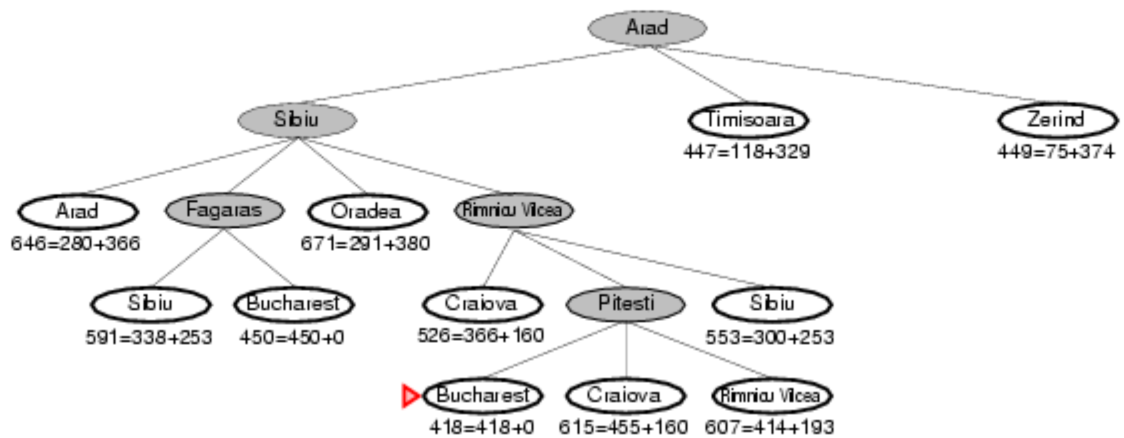
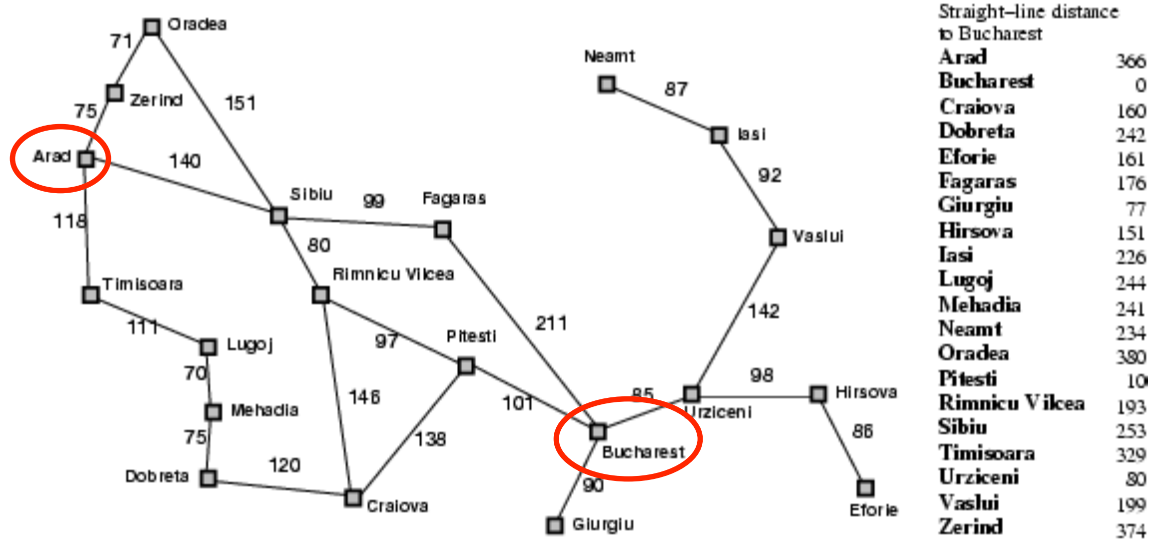
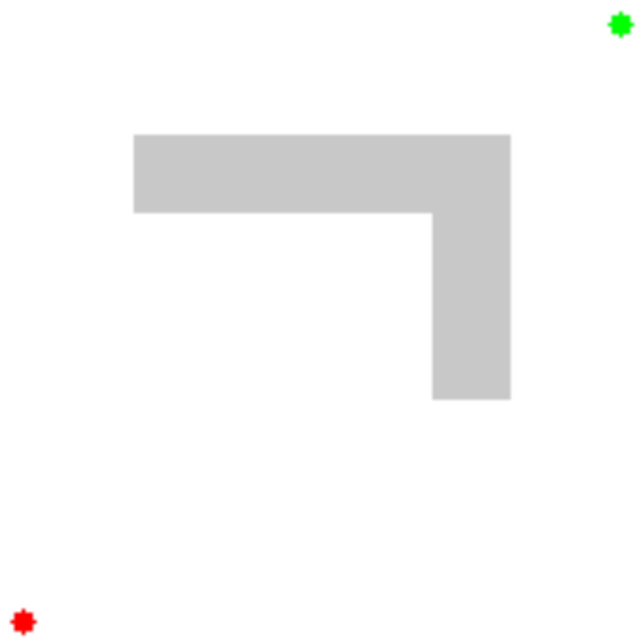


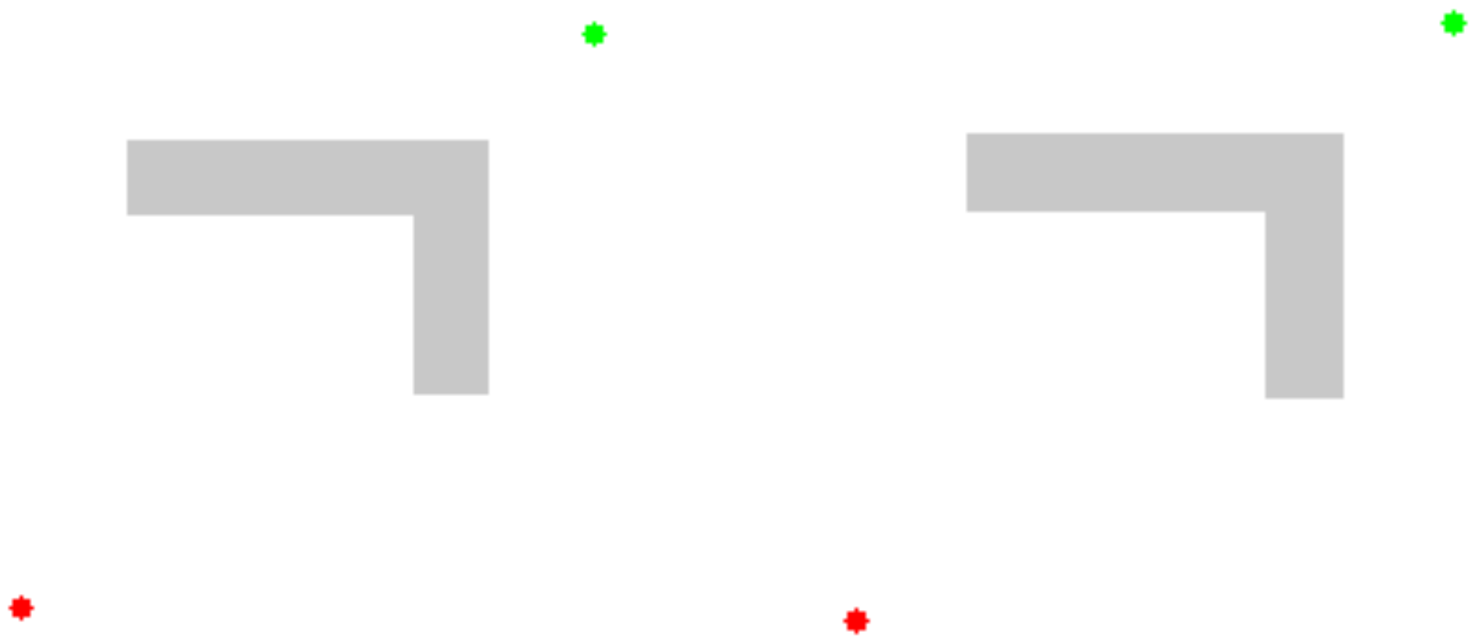


Another example



Source: [Wikipedia]

Uniform cost search vs. A* search



Source: [Wikipedia]()

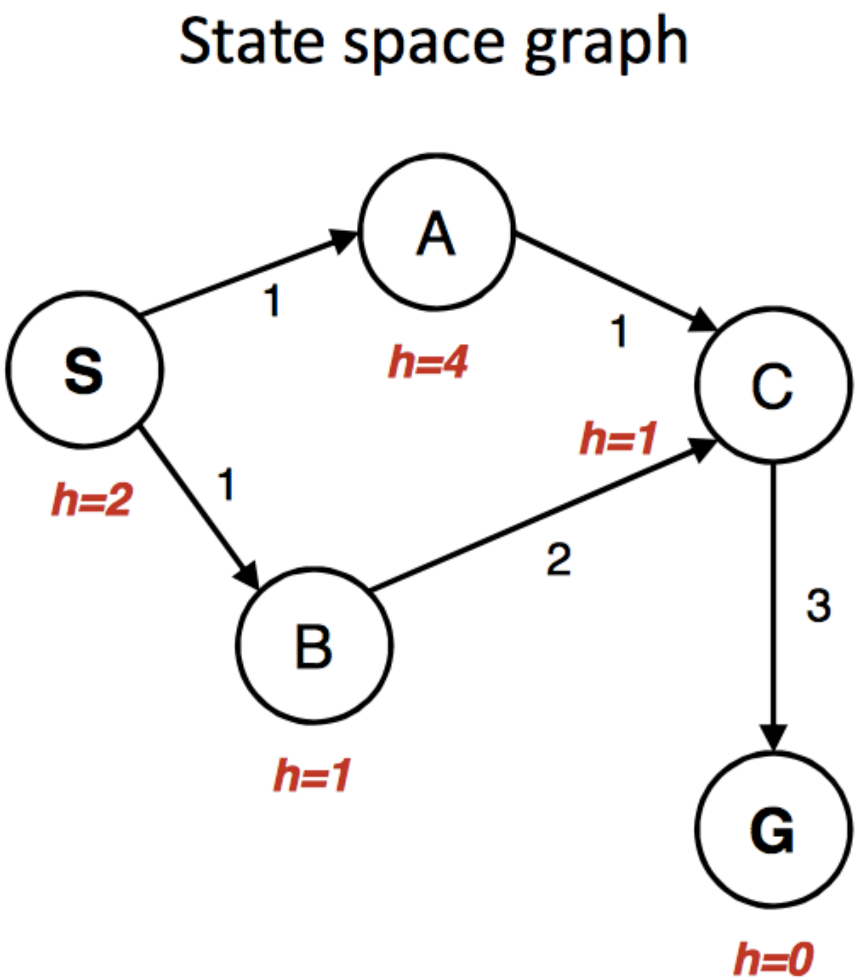
Admissible heuristics

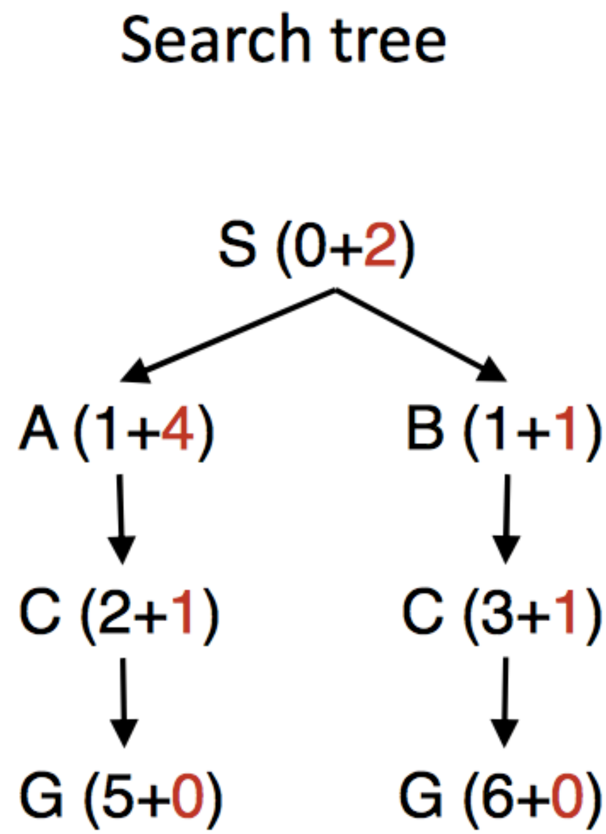
- An admissible heuristic never overestimates the cost to reach the goal, i.e., it is optimistic
- A heuristic $h(n)$ is admissible if for every node n, $h(n) \leq h^*(n)$, where $h^*(n)$ is the true cost to reach the goal state from n
- Example: straight line distance never overestimates the actual road distance
- **Theorem:** If $h(n)$ is admissible, A^* is optimal

Optimality of A*

- **Theorem:** If $h(n)$ is admissible, A^* is optimal (if we don't do repeated state detection)
- Proof sketch:
  - A* expands all nodes for which $f(n) \leq C^*$, i.e., the *estimated* path cost to the goal is less than or equal to the *actual* path cost to the first goal encountered
  - When we reach the goal node, all the other nodes remaining on the frontier have *estimated* path costs to the goal that are at least as big as C^*
  - Because we are using an admissible heuristic, the *true* path costs to the goal for these nodes cannot be less than C^*

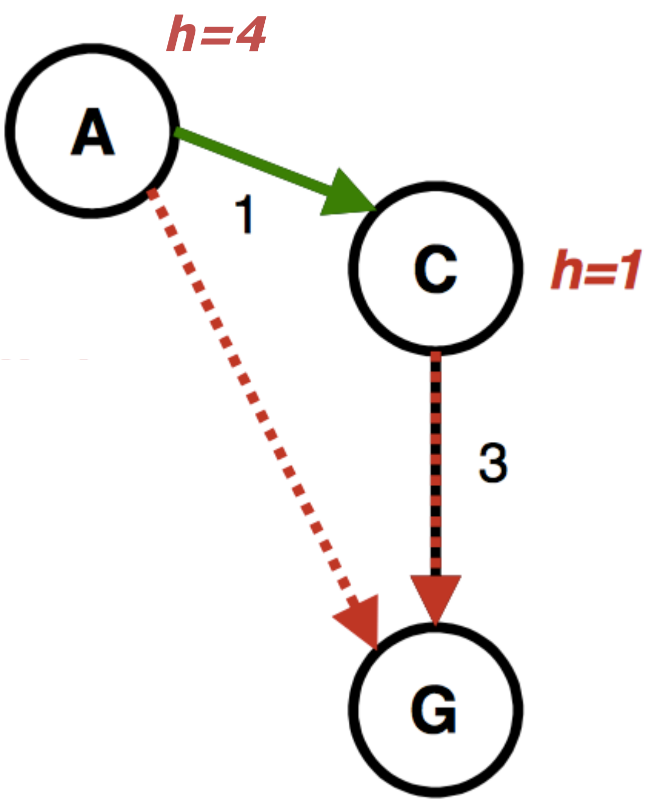
A* gone wrong?





Source: [Berkeley CS188x]()

Consistency of heuristics



- Consistency: Stronger than admissibility
- Definition:

  cost(A to C) + h(C) ≥ h(A)

  cost(A to C) ≥ h(A) - h(C)

  real cost ≥ cost implied by heuristic
- Consequences:
  - The f value along a path never decreases
  - A* graph search is optimal

Source: [Berkeley CS188x]

Optimality of A*

- **Tree search** (i.e., search without repeated state detection):
  - A* is optimal if heuristic is ***admissible*** (and non-negative)
- **Graph search** (i.e., search with repeated state detection)
  - A* optimal if heuristic is ***consistent***
- Consistency implies admissibility
  - In general, most natural admissible heuristics tend to be consistent, especially if they come from relaxed problems

Source: [Berkeley CS188x]

Optimality of A*

- A* is *optimally efficient* – no other tree-based algorithm that uses the same heuristic can expand fewer nodes and still be guaranteed to find the optimal solution
  - Any algorithm that does not expand all nodes with $f(n) \leq C^*$ risks missing the optimal solution

Properties of A*

- **Complete?**

  Yes – unless there are infinitely many nodes with $f(n) \leq C^*$

- **Optimal?**

  Yes

- **Time?**

  Number of nodes for which $f(n) \leq C^*$ (exponential)

- **Space?**

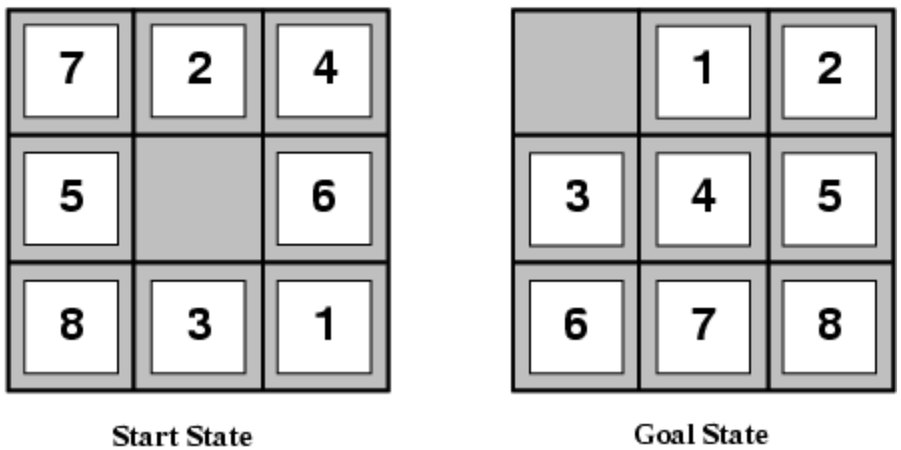
  Exponential

Designing heuristic functions

- Heuristics for the 8-puzzle

  $h_1(n)$ = number of misplaced tiles

  $h_2(n)$ = total Manhattan distance (number of squares from desired location of each tile)



$h_1(\text{start}) = 8$

$h_2(\text{start}) = 3+1+2+2+2+3+3+2 = 18$

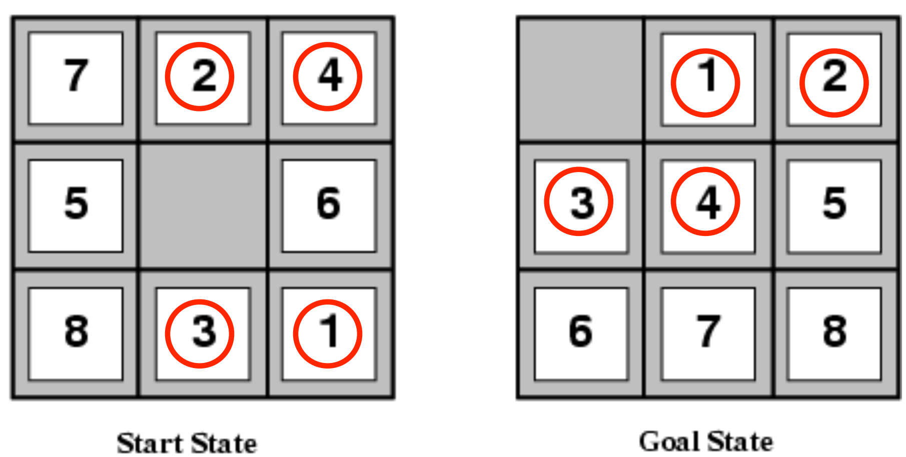
- Are h_1 and h_2 admissible?

Heuristics from relaxed problems

- A problem with fewer restrictions on the actions is called a relaxed problem
- The cost of an optimal solution to a relaxed problem is an admissible heuristic for the original problem
- If the rules of the 8-puzzle are relaxed so that a tile can move anywhere, then $h_1(n)$ gives the shortest solution
- If the rules are relaxed so that a tile can move to any adjacent square, then $h_2(n)$ gives the shortest solution

Heuristics from subproblems

- Let $h_3(n)$ be the cost of getting a subset of tiles (say, 1,2,3,4) into their correct positions
- Can precompute and save the exact solution cost for every possible subproblem instance – *pattern database*



Dominance

- If h_1 and h_2 are both admissible heuristics and $h_2(n) \geq h_1(n)$ for all n, (both admissible) then h_2 dominates h_1
- Which one is better for search?
  - A* search expands every node with $f(n) < C^*$ or $h(n) < C^* - g(n)$
  - Therefore, A* search with h_1 will expand more nodes

Dominance

- Typical search costs for the 8-puzzle (average number of nodes expanded for different solution depths):

- d=12 IDS = 3,644,035 nodes
  $A^*(h_1)$ = 227 nodes
  $A^*(h_2)$ = 73 nodes

- d=24 IDS ≈ 54,000,000,000 nodes
  $A^*(h_1)$ = 39,135 nodes
  $A^*(h_2)$ = 1,641 nodes

Combining heuristics

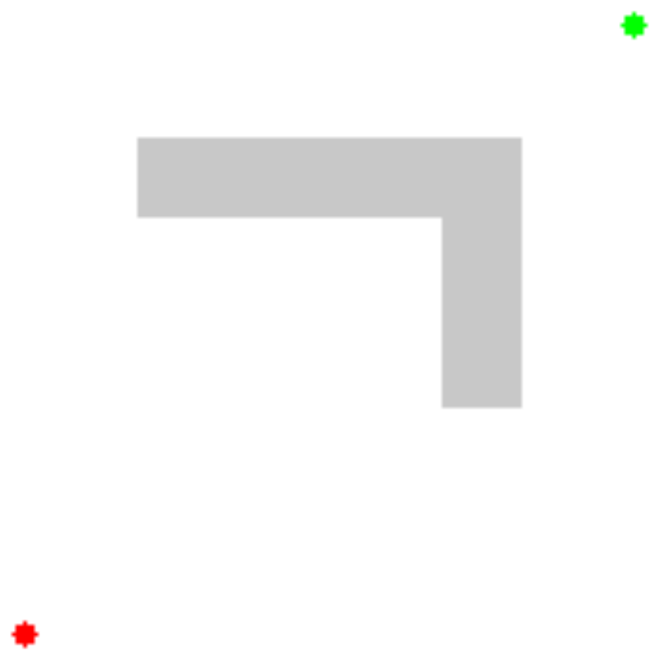
- Suppose we have a collection of admissible heuristics $h_1(n)$, $h_2(n)$, …, $h_m(n)$, but none of them dominates the others
- How can we combine them?

$$h(n) = \max\{h_1(n), h_2(n), \ldots, h_m(n)\}$$

Weighted A* search

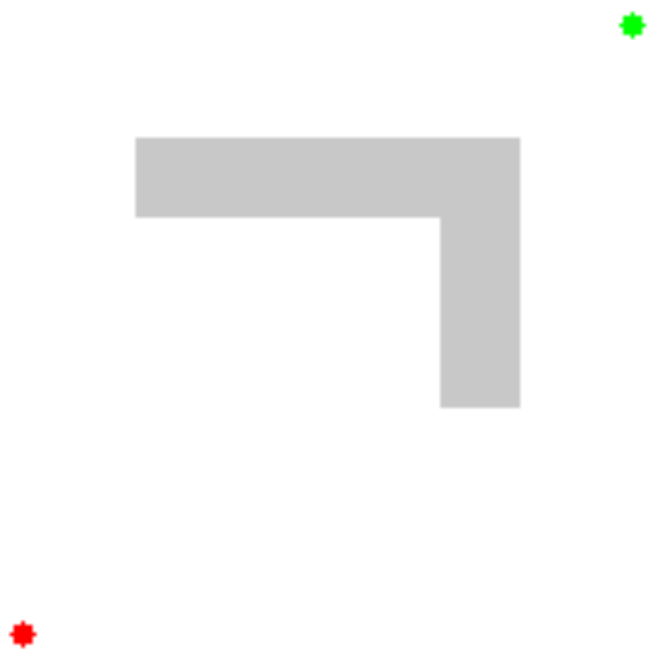
- **Idea:** speed up search at the expense of optimality
- Take an admissible heuristic, "inflate" it by a multiple $\alpha > 1$, and then perform A* search as usual
- Fewer nodes tend to get expanded, but the resulting solution may be suboptimal (its cost will be at most α times the cost of the optimal solution)

Example of weighted A* search

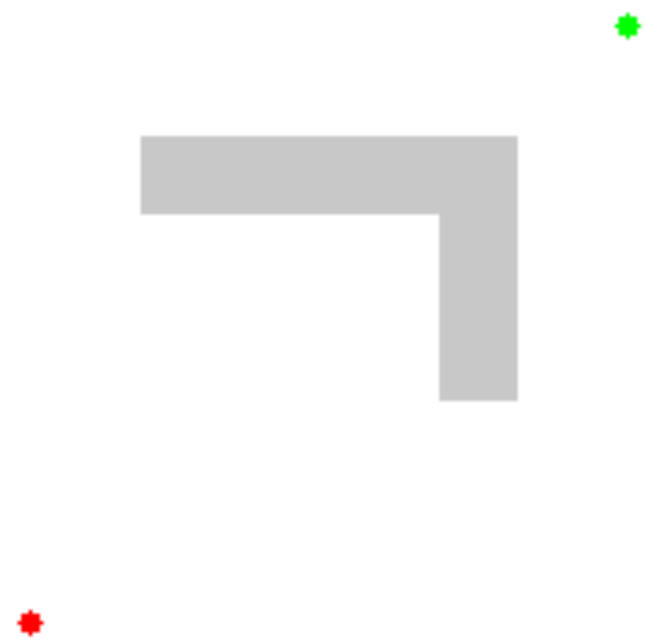


Heuristic: 5 * Euclidean distance from goal
Source: [Wikipedia]

Example of weighted A* search



Heuristic: 5 * Euclidean distance from goal
Source: [Wikipedia]



Compare: Exact A*

Additional pointers

- Interactive path finding demo
- Variants of A* for path finding on grids

All search strategies

Algorithm	Complete?	Optimal?	Time complexity	Space complexity
BFS	Yes	If all step costs are equal	$O(b^d)$	$O(b^d)$
DFS	No	No	$O(b^m)$	$O(bm)$
IDS	Yes	If all step costs are equal	$O(b^d)$	$O(bd)$
UCS	Yes	Yes	Number of nodes with $g(n) \leq C^*$	
Greedy	No	No	Worst case: $O(b^m)$ Best case: $O(bd)$	
A*	Yes	Yes (if heuristic is admissible)	Number of nodes with $g(n)+h(n) \leq C^*$	

A note on the complexity of search

- We said that the worst-case complexity of search is exponential in the length of the solution path
  - But the length of the solution path can be exponential in the number of “objects” in the problem!
- Example: towers of Hanoi