## Planning heuristic evaluation

By Carsten Isert, July 2017

This heuristic evaluation is part of the Udacity AI Nanodegree project 3 on logic and planning and evaluates the performance of several types of algorithms on 3 air cargo planning problems. The problem definition and tasks can be found at: <https://github.com/udacity/AIND-Planning> The code for this project is available at: <https://github.com/CarstenIsert/AIND-Planning>

### Results

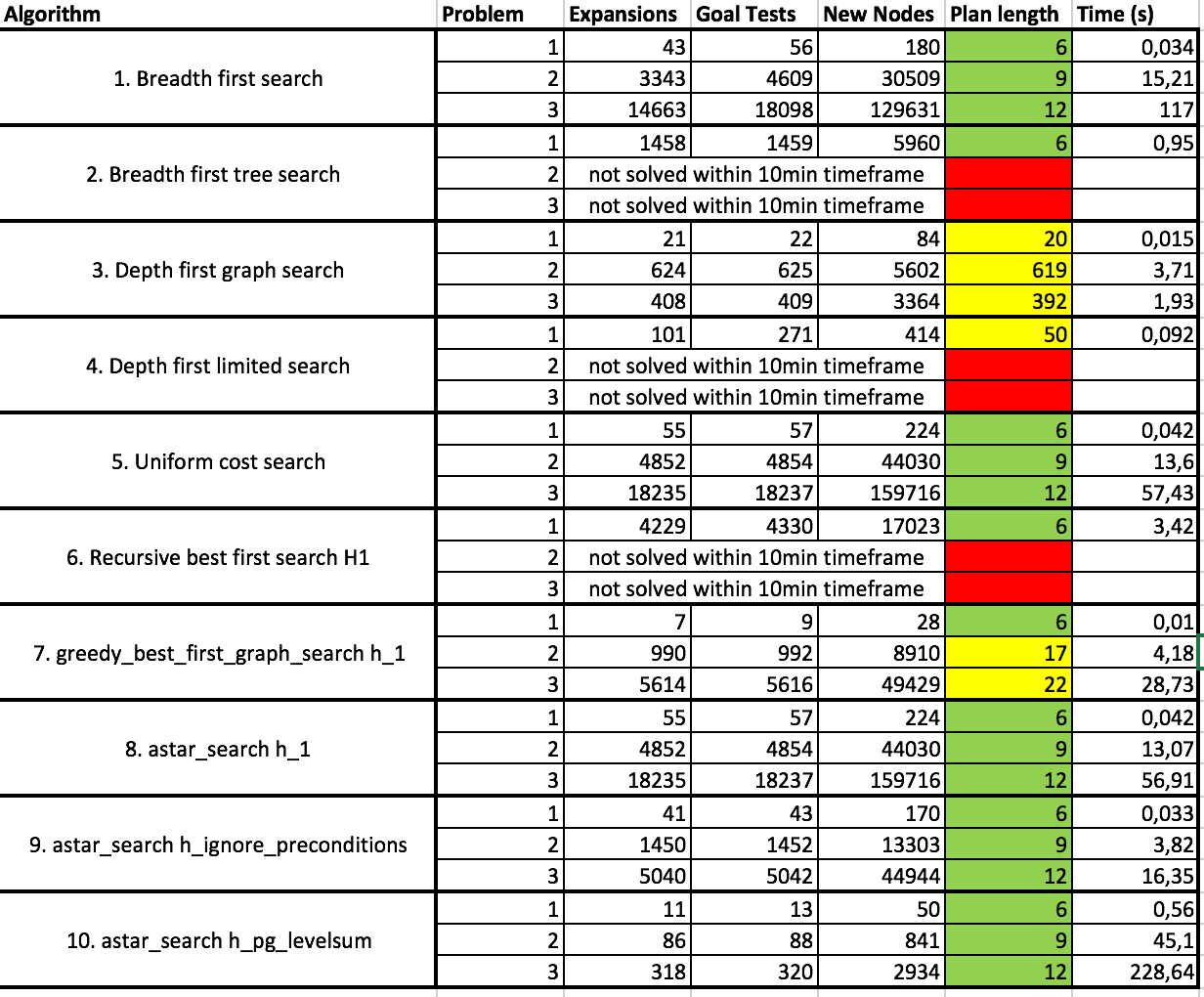


Table 1 gives an overview of the metrics for the different problems and algorithms. The solutions are color coded. Green in the column for the plan length indicates that the solution is optimal. Yellow indicates that a solution has been found and red indicates that no solution was found within the 10min time limit.

### Discussion of non-heuristic search

The general observation is, that a wide range of algorithms have problems solving even these 3 very simple problems. Those being able to solve the problems take a long time for it. The fastest solution for the non-heuristic searches to find the optimal solution was the uniform cost search with 57,43s. The quickest way to find a solution was the depth first graph search (algorithm 3), but the solutions found by this algorithm were ridiculously long and included many actions that loaded and unloaded cargo several times before making other moves. Clearly, the solutions cannot be used for practical purposes.

As could be expected by the theoretical analysis, breadth first search (algorithm 1) could solve the problem and found the optimal solution for all problems as discussed in (Russell & Norvig, 2010) page 82: ‘…breadth first search is optimal if the path cost is a nondecreasing function of the depth of the node.’ This is the case for the planning problem where the number of steps is the cost.

Compared to uniform cost search (algorithm 5), the number of nodes expanded and the number of goal tests was even lower, but the runtime exceeded the one of uniform cost search. For problem 3 the runtime was more than twice as much. However, this behavior is not consistent over all problem classes, so a hypothesis is, that the memory management of Python makes breadth first slower as it requires much more memory to evaluate all nodes. As the cost in this problem is the same as the step cost, uniform cost search cannot use it’s full potential and as it has to postpone the goal test, more nodes might need to be expanded. It is also proven that it provides the optimal solution (Russell & Norvig, 2010) page 85: ‘…uniform cost search expands nodes in order of their optimal path cost. Hence, the first goal node selected for expansion must be the optimal solution.’

### Discussion of heuristic search

The general expectation about the heuristic searches was that they would solve the 3 given simple problems easily without much computation requirements. The result table shows, that compared to the non-heuristic search, the heuristic search methods performed much better in terms of being able to find the optimal solutions and the required computation time. So, adding a heuristic generally makes sense.

However, the computation times required to solve the simple problems make it hard to believe, that real world problems can be solved by these algorithms at all. Comparing the A\* heuristics for ignore preconditions and the one using the planning graph and computing the level sum show that a simple heuristic like ignore preconditions can be much faster than constructing a complicated planning graph. For problem 3 the number of nodes created and expanded was by an order of magnitude less for the planning graph, but the computation time was by an order of magnitude longer.

It must be mentioned that the implementation for the planning graph was focusing on mimicking the available instructions and pseudo code rather than runtime optimizations. As there are many nested loops especially for the mutex calculation it is likely that there can be much more efficient implementations for the planning graph which allow working on larger problems.

### Conclusion

For the type of problems encountered during the implementation of this exercise a clear recommendation would be to use A\* search with the simple ignore preconditions heuristic as this is by far the fastest algorithm to find the correct solution and requires only a simple well known search algorithm. In contrast, the planning graph is a very complex algorithm and structure. To extend this to larger problems a more sophisticated heuristic could be designed that relaxes not so many preconditions.

### Optimal sequences

Problem 1:

Load(C2, P2, JFK)

Load(C1, P1, SFO)

Fly(P2, JFK, SFO)

Unload(C2, P2, SFO)

Fly(P1, SFO, JFK)

Unload(C1, P1, JFK)

Problem 2:

Load(C1, P1, SFO)

Load(C2, P2, JFK)

Load(C3, P3, ATL)

Fly(P1, SFO, JFK)

Fly(P2, JFK, SFO)

Fly(P3, ATL, SFO)

Unload(C3, P3, SFO)

Unload(C1, P1, JFK)

Unload(C2, P2, SFO)

Problem 3:

Load(C1, P1, SFO)

Load(C2, P2, JFK)

Fly(P1, SFO, ATL)

Load(C3, P1, ATL)

Fly(P2, JFK, ORD)

Load(C4, P2, ORD)

Fly(P2, ORD, SFO)

Fly(P1, ATL, JFK)

Unload(C4, P2, SFO)

Unload(C3, P1, JFK)

Unload(C1, P1, JFK)

Unload(C2, P2, SFO)

# References

Russell, S., & Norvig, P. (2010). *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach* (3rd edition Ausg.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.