

# Implement Trie (Prefix Tree)

## What to build:

- a Trie Node that stores:
  - children: 26-way pointers / refs (array of size 26 or an unordered map <char, Trie Node\*>)
  - isEnd: bool flag marking end-of-word.
- a Trie with methods:
  - insert(word)
  - search(word)
  - startsWith(prefix)

## Design choices:

- Array[26] children
  - fastest & memory-predictable - wastes space if many nodes are sparse.
- Hash / map children
  - saves space for sparse trees - a tiny bit slower due to hashing.

## Indices & helpers:

- index for a letter:  $idx = ch - 'a'$
- when walking: if child absent  $\rightarrow$  create for insert, fail for search / startsWith.

## Operations (step-by-step):

insert(word)

1. node = root
2. for each ch in word:
  - compute child index / lookup
  - if child missing  $\rightarrow$  create new node and link
  - move node = child
3. after loop: node.isEnd = true

search (word)

1. node = root
2. for each ch in word:
  - if child missing  $\rightarrow$  return false
  - move to child
3. return node.isEnd (must be end of word, not just a prefix).

starts with (prefix)

1. same walk as search
2. but at the end, don't check isEnd; if you didn't break early, return true

### Complexity:

- Let  $L$  be the length of the string / prefix.
- insert, search, starts with are all  $O(L)$  time.
- space: total nodes  $\leq$  sum of inserted word lengths.

### Pitfalls to avoid:

- Don't return true in search just because a path exists - must check isEnd.
- Handle empty strings if the platform might pass them (this problem's constraints say length  $\geq 1$ , so you're safe).
- When using array [26], initialize children to nullptr (or equivalent).