



# Finding Security Issues in (Open Source) Software Repositories

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# Declaration

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# Abstract

In both proprietary and Free/Libre and Open Source Softwares (FLOSS) components, not all security vulnerabilities are documented in CVE format nor published in the vulnerability databases such as NVD. These vulnerabilities could have been fixed by the developers. Finding these vulnerability-fixing commits could provide valuable insights for the developers using those components. Therefore, the objective of this project is to develop a repository mining tool that is able to detect vulnerability-fixing commits using MSR approach. Comparing to previous approaches, the tool will be focusing on searches the commit message first, and then investigates the code difference in each commit.

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background . . . . .	1
1.2	Objectives . . . . .	2
1.3	Challenges . . . . .	3
1.4	Report Structure . . . . .	4
1.5	Relationship to Degree Programme . . . . .	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Open Source Security . . . . .	5
2.2	Taxonomy of Software Vulnerabilities . . . . .	6
2.2.1	Common Weakness Enumeration . . . . .	6
2.2.2	Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures . . . . .	6
2.3	Security Issues in Open Source Softwares . . . . .	7
2.3.1	Using Components with Known Vulnerabilities . . . . .	7
2.4	Mining Software Repositories . . . . .	9
2.4.1	Keywords Search . . . . .	10
2.4.2	Properties of Vulnerability-Fixing Commits . . . . .	10
2.4.3	Finding Security Vulnerabilities . . . . .	11
2.4.4	Source Code Analysis . . . . .	13
2.5	Usage of the Repository Mining Tool in Other Areas . . . . .	13
2.5.1	Bugs Finding Model . . . . .	13
2.5.2	Machine Learning Model for Automated Vulnerability Prediction . . . . .	14
<b>3</b>	<b>Requirements and Analysis</b>	<b>15</b>

## CONTENTS

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3.1	Project Objectives . . . . .	15
3.2	Software Requirements and Scope . . . . .	16
3.2.1	Functional Requirements . . . . .	16
3.2.2	Non-functional Requirements . . . . .	17
3.2.3	Scope . . . . .	17
3.3	Analysis . . . . .	18
3.3.1	Programming Language . . . . .	18
3.3.2	Libraries and Tools . . . . .	18
3.3.3	File Format of Result . . . . .	19
3.4	Proposed Method . . . . .	19
3.5	Problems and Constraints . . . . .	19
3.5.1	Quality of Commit Messages . . . . .	20
3.5.2	Results Evaluation Process . . . . .	20
3.5.3	Code Changes Analysis . . . . .	21
3.6	Testing . . . . .	22
3.6.1	Unit Testing . . . . .	22
3.6.2	System Testing . . . . .	22
3.7	Evaluation . . . . .	22
3.7.1	Real-world Projects Evaluation . . . . .	23
3.7.2	Quality Evaluation . . . . .	23
3.8	Ethical Issues . . . . .	24
<b>4</b>	<b>Progress</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1	Main achievements to date . . . . .	25
<b>5</b>	<b>Project Plan</b>	<b>26</b>
5.1	Semester 1 and Christmas Vacation . . . . .	26
5.1.1	Deliverables . . . . .	26
5.2	Semester 2 . . . . .	27
5.2.1	Iteration 1 . . . . .	27
5.2.2	Iteration 2 . . . . .	27
5.2.3	Semester 2 Overview . . . . .	27
5.2.4	Deliverables . . . . .	28
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>29</b>

# List of Figures

2.1	Examples of vulnerability-fixing commit . . . . .	11
3.1	Comparison of a CVE-identified and common vulnerability- fixing commit . . . . .	18
3.2	Example of code changes to prevent SQL injection [23] . . . .	21

# List of Tables

3.1	Functional requirements of the mining tool . . . . .	16
3.2	Non-functional requirements of the mining tool . . . . .	17
3.3	Documentation format of the unit testing . . . . .	22



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Free/Libre and Open Source Software (**FLOSS**) is a type of software whose license allows the users to inspect, use, modify and redistribute the software's source code [15]. Since the introduction of the version control system, many repository hosting sites such as SourceForge [75], Google Code [27], and GitHub [24] have been launched. As a result, the participation of global communities into FLOSS projects have started to grow and different contributions were made to improve the softwares quality, which included fixing software vulnerabilities [20].

Building a secure software is expensive, difficult, and time-consuming. It is necessary to know when and how a security vulnerability is fixed throughout the software lifecycle. Software components such as plugins and application processing interfaces (**APIs**) are usually developed by third-party developers and widely reused in both open source and closed source softwares [36]. An important factor of the software security is determined by the information provided by the vendor of the software components for deciding whether to perform the security update. Hence, the users of software components are advised to check the National Vulnerability Database (**NVD**) [53] regularly for detailed information of the vulnerabilities identified in the software components used. Furthermore, it would be more helpful if the developers of the

software components clearly record the list of changes or provide informative Git commit messages for every version update of their component.

To perform a risk assessment of a potentially vulnerable component, it is required to have a deep understanding of the vulnerability entry points. However, not all projects follow the CVE format or publish CVEs, and CVE reports are usually lack of technical details that attribute the specific entry points of the vulnerability, which is an important aspect in part of the risk assessment. By identifying the vulnerability-fixing commits, the vulnerable lines of code can be located, which allows the users to check if a vulnerable component is being used or not. However, some developers believe that public disclosure of security vulnerabilities patch is dangerous, thus vulnerability-fixing commits are not commonly identified and recorded specifically in some open source software repositories to prevent malicious exploits [7]. As a result, there is a practical difficulty in applying this analysis approach to find the security relevant commits that are not documented using CVE or a similar format, which are known as the silent patches.

To address these issues, a repository mining tool that investigates commit messages and identifies vulnerable software components can be developed to reduce the time and cost required to mitigate the vulnerabilities. The repository mining tool should be able to detect the silent patches through an advanced process, which the tool must analyse the source code changes between commits to locate the vulnerable lines of code. Moreover, the mining tool should be applicable to all types of software projects that are using Git as their version control system. Projects that are using a different version control system are also supported after they have been migrated to Git.

## 1.2 Objectives

- Identify the security patterns of the most popular security issues in OWASP Top Ten Project.
- Develop a repository mining tool to search through the commit history of a repository and find a list of commit messages that match the

patterns. The list should be produced in a suitable file format such as JSON, XML, or CSV.

- Extend the mining tool which checks the code difference in the commits found to obtain the actual commits fixing the security vulnerabilities. This extension should separate from the mining process to make the mining results easier to verify and debug.

### 1.3 Challenges

This section is a brief summary of the main challenges that might occurred during the project. A more thorough analysis of the problems and constraints is carried out in **Section 3.5**.

- **Data:** There are a large number of open source repositories available on GitHub. However, it is challenging to find a set of sample repositories that can produce accurate and consistent results.
- **Misclassification:** The commit messages for the same vulnerability patch are not always the same, thus misclassification is inevitable. Using regular expressions to match the patterns in the mining process do not guarantee the correctness of the result.
- **Evaluation:** After mining a list of commits that contain the identified patterns in its message, the evaluation process might not correctly locate the lines of code that addressed the security vulnerability. It might be required to perform a manual evaluation to correctly identify some of the results.
- **Time:** Large repository such as Linux which has more than 780,000 commits in total [40] could be extremely time-consuming for the repository mining tool to complete the search and evaluation process.

### 1.4 Report Structure

**Chapter 2** reviews a range of academic articles, theories, and previous studies that is related to this project, as well as investigating the techniques and tools to be used.

**Chapter 3** is a list of detailed requirements and a thorough analysis of design, implementation and testing stage. Some core decisions are reviewed in the analysis part to ensure the feasibility of the project.

**Chapter 4** is a comparison between different design concepts, where the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches are stated. The chosen design is justified with suitable diagrams provided including wireframes and UML component diagrams.

**Chapter 5** describes the implementation process by highlighting novel aspects to the algorithms used. Testing is performed by following a suitable model to evaluate the implementation.

**Chapter 6** presents all the results along with critical discussions about the main findings, and outlines the possible improvements that could be made in the future work.

**Chapter 7** summarises the main points of previous chapters and emphasise the results found.

### 1.5 Relationship to Degree Programme

This project focuses on the research of real-world software security problems and offers valuable insights into computer security. By studying the patterns of security vulnerabilities patch in open source repositories, the practical knowledge for building and ensuring a secure system could be gained. Moreover, the difficulty of improving software security could be experienced during the evaluation process in this project. This relates to the Software Engineering degree as it requires a good understanding in version control system and it aims to improve softwares quality by reducing the time and effort needed to find security vulnerabilities in the source code.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

This chapter will start with the background contents of the project, and then focus on discussing the security aspect of open source softwares. Additionally, previous and existing relevant works are reviewed and a critical analysis is provided for the comparison of these resources and this project.

### 2.1 Open Source Security

The security of open source softwares mostly rely on the collaboration of the community. It is deduced that the power of open data and crowdsourcing will make open source security more reliable [30, 80], and provides more flexibility and freedom over the security option to their users [61]. However, when it comes to publishing the vulnerability information, it is suggested that the list of unconfirmed vulnerabilities should not be published publicly to protect the users from potential harms [71].

Arora, Nandkumar and Telang [28] have shown that vulnerabilities that are either secret or published but not patched attract fewer attacks than patched vulnerabilities. Although the research was conducted in 2006 and the results might be outdated, it still implies that developers might include a silent patch into some of the commits that is not explicitly recorded in the commit messages. It might be a rational approach for not disclosing the work attempted to fix a vulnerability, but other developers might not

be informed of the content change. Furthermore, if a similar vulnerability is discovered in the future, developers would need more effort for finding the previous solution. Therefore, it would be very useful for the developers if the mining tool developed in this project could detect the silent patches.

## 2.2 Taxonomy of Software Vulnerabilities

There are many software vulnerabilities being identified each year. By using a common vulnerability identifier system, vulnerability data can be shared across separate vulnerability databases to facilitate the interoperability of different tools. As this project focuses on finding security issues in open source repositories, it is necessary to discuss the industry-endorsed standard of software vulnerabilities categorisation.

### 2.2.1 Common Weakness Enumeration

The Common Weakness Enumeration (**CWE**) is a project launched by the Mitre Corporation and sponsored by the National Cyber Security Division of the United States Department of Homeland Security [16]. The CWE project organises the software weaknesses into a list of different categories, known as the CWE list. Software weaknesses are defined as errors that can lead to software vulnerabilities, which includes buffer overflows, authentication errors, code injection, etc. [17]. The CWE is now a formal standard for representing software weaknesses. Each entry in the CWE list contains detailed information about the specific weakness and is identified by a unique ID number.

### 2.2.2 Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures

The Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (**CVE**) is another security project launched by the Mitre Corporation [18] to provide the community with a complete list of publicly known security vulnerabilities, known as the CVE entries. Each CVE entry is defined by an ID number, and includes a description followed by any relevant resources about the vulnerability. It is now the standardised solution and industry-recognised standard for identifying

vulnerabilities and exposures. However, developers and vendors are not required to publish security vulnerabilities of their projects in CVE format. They are allowed to use their own naming scheme for the vulnerabilities, even if the same vulnerability has already been recorded in the CVE list.

## 2.3 Security Issues in Open Source Softwares

The Open Web Application Security Project (**OWASP**) is a worldwide non-profit organization committed to improve and raise the awareness of software security [59]. The project members of OWASP have worked together to produce a list of the most critical web application security risks based on the community feedback and comprehensive data contributed by different organizations. The list consists of ten categories of security attacks which are considered to be the most dangerous and popular in recent years. In OWASP Top Ten 2017 [60], one of the vulnerabilities that is closely related to this project is *Using Components with Known Vulnerabilities*, which will be extensively discussed.

### 2.3.1 Using Components with Known Vulnerabilities

It has been indicated that a small software component could create a large error in a software system [9, 48, 72]. Components such as plugins, libraries, and modules are ubiquitous in both open source and proprietary softwares. Third-party components are increasingly being integrated into softwares to reduce the amount of time and effort required for development [8], but they also increase the risk of vulnerabilities being introduced into the softwares. These components are mostly maintained by different developers or organisations, and the time required to fix a vulnerability varies between developers. While the majority of third-party components are still being actively maintained after a long time, some of them might have depreciated and security patches are no longer being released. The users might continue to use a depreciated component if they could not find a better alternative. However, using outdated components greatly increase the risk of software exploits. Therefore, for any large-scale system, the developers must scan for vulnerabilities regularly and

subscribe to the security news related to the components used to reduce the risk of security vulnerabilities being introduced into the system.

Vulnerable components can be found using methods ranging from dependency checking to machine learning. While this project is related to the former approach, the latter approach concentrates on finding the relationship between software errors and vulnerabilities to identify or predict high-risk components. Dependency checking is an approach of detecting dependencies (plugins, libraries, etc.) with known vulnerabilities in a software. Several open source tools including OWASP Dependency Check [58], Retire.js [66], and Safety [69] are applications that identifies vulnerable dependencies in a software project. Cadariu et al. [12] have used the OWASP Dependency Check tool to find all known vulnerabilities that have a unique CVE identifier in proprietary softwares written in Java. According to their study, the OWASP Dependency Check tool has low precision due to the high false positives rate in the large data sets. However, Cadariu et al. justified that the tool is still usable by taking into account that the checking process is automated and any security issue found is considered a valuable information for the users.

Machine learning-based approaches are also applicable to find vulnerable components in a software system. Briand, Basili and Hetmanski [11] have developed a model with Optimised Set Reduction (OSR) algorithm that uses set theory, predicate logic, probability, and vector in the calculation. The model focused on identifying the components that are more likely to produce a large number of errors and it was proved to be effective, but the main drawbacks are the complexity of the implementation and the extensive calculations required. In comparison to Briand's approach, Scandariato et al. [70] have built a model that uses text mining techniques to predict vulnerable components. While Briand's model is capable of identifying high-risk components, Scandariato's model is able to predict vulnerabilities in the future releases of a software components, and the results achieved are satisfactory.

As a conclusion, static dependency checking tools provide a fast and easy way to scan for vulnerable components, but the users are required to verify the validity and compatibility of the results with their softwares. In contrast,



models that use machine learning technique has been proved to be effective and are more likely to produce consistent and accurate results. However, such models require a large amount of training data and are only designed for a specific area. While dependency checking approach is more related to the scope of this project, the capability of predicting vulnerable software components through machine learning is a great way of preventing severe software errors. In future work, machine learning could be incorporated into the tool developed in this project to improve its overall effectiveness.

## 2.4 Mining Software Repositories

Mining Software Repositories (**MSR**) is a process of collecting and analysing data from repositories, which includes version control repositories, mailing list repositories, and bug tracking repositories. MSR applies to a wide range of fields such as business, research, and security [63]. The purpose of MSR is to extract practical information from rich metadata and discover hidden trends about a specific evolutionary characteristic [35]. The information collected could be used in various development process. For example, some developers could gain insight by mining repositories, which may help them to enhance their software quality based on previous implementation evidence of other developers [29]. While MSR have various usages in different areas, the primary objective of this project will be focusing on finding the security issues in open source software repositories through MSR.

In order to identify both hidden and publicly disclosed patches, it is required to make effective use of MSR technique. A MSR process is normally carried out using tools or scripts made by the researchers themselves. Although there are many types of research in the MSR field in recent years, the majority of the tools or scrips used are not published publicly [67]. As a result, it is not possible to fully replicate the previous research methods and make improvements based on that. Despite the undisclosed information of research methods in many papers, Shang [73] suggested that the MSR process should be split into several stages, with each stage focusing on a specific topic of the problem to achieve the optimal efficiency.

### 2.4.1 Keywords Search

For many complex approaches, the keywords searching process is considered to be the fundamental step. If the initial results produced in the searching stage is good, a huge amount of effort could be reduced in the later stages. However, the prerequisite is that the repository must have a sufficient amount of valuable information, which can be estimated by judging the history of the repository. To correctly and precisely retrieve the information for a query, it is required to integrate some algorithms and modules into the search function. Matsushita, Sasaki, and Inoue [44] developed a repository search system that makes use of two functions: lexical analysis function and token comparing function. The system produced very detailed results by deploying recursive search strategy using the keywords found into every commit. On the contrary, Mockus and Votta [46] designed an automated program that makes use of normalisation, word frequency analysis, and keyword clustering techniques to search the commit messages. Although the program is able to retrieve the results that include the keywords, the algorithm is unable to identify similar terms or inconsistent form of wording for the commit messages.

### 2.4.2 Properties of Vulnerability-Fixing Commits

For every vulnerability identified in a repository, the vulnerability-fixing process that involves analysis, implementation, testing, and release will be executed [57]. Most of the vulnerability-fixing commits are pushed during the implementation and testing stage of the process. However, if the commit message of a fixing commit is ambiguous, it will be challenging for any tools to determine the correctness of the commit. In order to analyse the common features of the vulnerability-fixing commits, it is needed to find these commits in open source repositories first. By analysing the properties of vulnerability-fixing commits, it will ease the implementation of the repository mining tool and enhance the quality of the regular expressions used.

Meneely et al. [45] conducted a research to study the properties of commits that introduce vulnerabilities, in which a reverse approach was used to find vulnerability-contributing commit by backtracking from the vulnerability-

fixing commits. Meneely et al. identified the vulnerability-fixing commits by investigating into each vulnerability manually to find the respective fixing commit. However, the process of identifying vulnerability-fixing commit was not clearly explained by them, thus no constructive information about the properties of vulnerability-fixing commits is provided. On the contrary, Vásquez, Bavota and Velásquez [38] discovered that some vulnerability-fixing commits are grouped with other commits to address a vulnerability, which matches the assumption of Neuhaus and Plattner [49], and thus only part of the code committed is related to the vulnerability fix.

**libceph: implement CEPHX\_V2 calculation mode**

Derive the signature from the entire buffer (both AES cipher blocks) instead of using just the first half of the first block, leaving out data\_crc entirely.

This addresses CVE-2018-1129.

(a) Vulnerability fix in Linux kernel repository [39]

**Merge pull request #360 from jehiah/csrf\_validation\_360**

CSRF protection for OAuth flow.

(b) Vulnerability fix in oauth2 proxy repository [54]

**Figure 2.1:** A comparison of (a) a higher quality and (b) a lower quality vulnerability-fixing commit.

### 2.4.3 Finding Security Vulnerabilities

It has been reported that the descriptions and references in vulnerability databases are often lack of complete documentation [43], and vulnerability-fixing commit are not ubiquitous in every open source repository [77]. Finding a security vulnerability could be hard if the resources available are limited. Having completed the researches on keywords searching techniques and properties of vulnerability-fixing commit, the approach for finding vulnerabilities can now be reviewed.

In this project, a static repository mining tool will be developed to find security vulnerabilities in open source repositories. Previous researches included the use of static software auditing and vulnerability mitigation tools to find bugs and vulnerabilities [14]. However, Bessey et al. [10] claimed that static tools have a negative effect on technical development due to its high false positives rate. While this statement might be true, it does not imply that all static tools are not effective as they differ in the techniques used in finding vulnerabilities [47]. Static tools usually require many experiments with different configurations to obtain the best result, and the result may vary across different data sets. This project differs from previous researches by aiming to find the security vulnerabilities through Git commit messages first, and then analyse the code changes in the commits. Researches have shown that vulnerability-fixing commits could be retrieved by extracting commit hashes from CVE references and gathering all commits that refer to a CVE number in its commit message [33], or by performing syntactic and semantic analysis on the commit messages [74]. To verify the validity of the commits retrieved, a screening test [21] can be performed to investigate the code changes in a commit against several criteria and identify the correct vulnerability-fixing commits.

This project extends prior work on Reis and Abreu’s Secbench Mining Tool [64]. The tool aims to find vulnerabilities patch in GitHub repositories by using specific regular expressions for each vulnerability pattern. Then it creates a test case for every vulnerability found and these test cases are evaluated manually. Reis and Abreu [65] discussed the procedure of the evaluation and explained that human errors could occur due to source code complexity and similarity of vulnerability pattern. The approach of Secbench Mining Tool is similar to the concept of this project. However, performing manual evaluation on every result is not practical and it is proven that the use of automated algorithms can improve the detection process [42]. In this project, the tool developed should be able to automate the evaluation process to some extent, while preserving the accuracy of the results.

#### 2.4.4 Source Code Analysis

This section is an extension to **Section 2.4.3**. As this project involves in analysing the code changes in commits, it is necessary to review the techniques used to identify vulnerabilities by source code analysis.

Finding vulnerabilities by source code analysis technique is relatively difficult than analysing commit messages as it requires a high-level understanding in both software vulnerabilities and the programming language of the source code. Source code analysis tools are generally designed for a specific task, and are only usable for some programming languages [3]. One of the advantages of source code analysis tool is that it can analyse the code without executing it [41], but this could also be the drawback as it might generate more false positives than dynamic analysis. Zitser, Lippmann, and Leek [81] have developed a static code analysis tool to find buffer overflow vulnerability in C programming language code. Their approach requires manual definitions of the overflow patterns in their tool, which is considered to be a general method in static analysis.

### 2.5 Usage of the Repository Mining Tool in Other Areas

While the repository mining tool developed in this project is only capable of finding security issues through Git commits, it can be extended or modified to aid the researches in other areas. Some examples are briefly discussed in the subsections below.

#### 2.5.1 Bugs Finding Model

Both Williams and Hollingsworth [79] and Ostrand and Weyuker [56] utilised MSR technique in their bugs finding model. Williams and Hollingsworth mined the code changes in each commit to find possible bugs, while Ostrand and Weyuker mined the most frequently modified files between version releases to predict the bugs-prone files.

### **2.5.2 Machine Learning Model for Automated Vulnerability Prediction**

In comparison to the static approach used in the mining tool, machine learning technique could be introduced to achieve higher reliability and accuracy on the result. Nguyen and Tran [50] and Perl et al. [62] have built their machine learning model with dependency graph and vulnerability-contributing commit as their main approach respectively, while Li et al. [37] and Russell et al. [68] used source code analysis method in their machine learning model. According to their researches, machine learning models are able to produce relatively high accuracy results.

## Chapter 3

# Requirements and Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to express the aims in details and discuss the problems to be solved. This chapter will outline the requirements of the project and list the criteria to be met. The analysis part will cover every aspect of the design, implementation, and testing stage to ensure that the project is feasible.

### 3.1 Project Objectives

Initially, the objectives set in **Section 1.2** are an ideal concept of this project. Having completed the background research and literature review, it is now possible to provide a detailed description and more clearly defined objectives that improve the feasibility of this project.

1. **Vulnerability patterns:** The term ‘vulnerability pattern’ is used to represent the commit message pattern of different vulnerabilities. Correctly identifying the regular expression of each vulnerability pattern is time-consuming, and it would also need considerable refinement throughout the whole project. Hence, it might be more appropriate to reuse and improve the patterns provided in previous related works.
2. **Mining the commits:** This task involves creating a repository mining tool that makes extensive use of the pre-defined regular expressions to

search for the relevant commits. It is necessary to consider how closely a commit needs to match with the patterns for it to be included in the result. The file format for storing the results is JSON, and reasons are justified in **Section 3.3.3**.

3. **Evaluating the mined commits:** The mining tool can be extended to include a separate function that evaluates the commits mined to find the actual code commit addressing the security vulnerabilities. This project will consider to automate the evaluation process to some extent while maintaining the accuracy of the results at the standard level.

## 3.2 Software Requirements and Scope

### 3.2.1 Functional Requirements

Criteria	Importance
<b>Compatibility:</b> The mining tool should be able to run on all machines that meet the system requirements.	Essential
<b>Completeness:</b> The mining tool should be able to find all relevant commits of security vulnerabilities based on the regular expressions.	Essential
<b>Repeatable:</b> The results should be repeatable and reproducible.	Essential
<b>Scalability:</b> The mining tool should be able to work on different project sizes, provided that the repository contains a certain amount of information.	Essential
<b>Automated Evaluation:</b> The process of classifying and evaluating the commits into different vulnerabilities patch should be automated to a certain extent.	Desirable
<b>Robustness:</b> The mining tool should be able to handle all possible errors without terminating the mining process.	Desirable

**Table 3.1:** Functional requirements of the mining tool



### 3.2.2 Non-functional Requirements

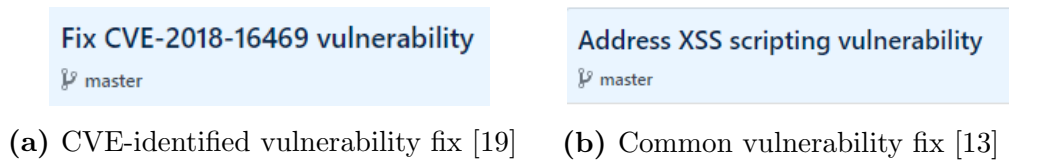
Criteria	Importance
<b>Code Style:</b> The source code should be well-commented and follow a consistent coding style.	Essential
<b>Documentation:</b> Installation and user manual should be provided.	Essential
<b>Lightweight:</b> The mining tool should have minimal dependencies.	Essential
<b>Open source:</b> As the mining tool is built for researching open source repositories, it should be open source to suit the use cases.	Essential
<b>Performance:</b> The performance of the mining tool should be optimised for different project sizes.	Desirable

**Table 3.2:** Non-functional requirements of the mining tool

### 3.2.3 Scope

In addition to **Table 3.1** and **Table 3.2**, several fundamental requirements can be included to define the scope of the mining tool.

- **Language in Commit Messages:** The mining tool will only search for commit messages that are written in English.
- **Programming Language:** The source code analysis function in the mining tool will only support Python 3.
- **Repository type:** The mining tool will only support Git repositories. Hence, other version control systems such will have to convert to Git first before using the mining tool.
- **Vulnerability type:** It is aimed that the mining tool should be able to detect CVE-identified vulnerabilities that have been fixed and recorded in the commit message **Figure 3.1 (a)**, and vulnerabilities that are not identified in CVE but recorded in the commit messages **Figure 3.1 (b)**.



**Figure 3.1:** An example of (a) a CVE-identified vulnerability fix and (b) a common vulnerability fix.

### 3.3 Analysis

The aim of this section is to contemplate the options available for this project and review some of the fundamental decisions to be made before the implementation.

#### 3.3.1 Programming Language

Python 3 [78] is chosen to be the main programming language for the repository mining tool. While other programming languages may be more suitable for tackling specific problems of this project, Python 3 provides sufficient coverage over every aspect with its comprehensive functionality. The greatest advantage of Python 3 is that it has a wide range of libraries that facilitate the development environment, which fully justified that a complete working solution can be produced using Python 3.

#### 3.3.2 Libraries and Tools

Since the mining tool is decided to be programmed in Python 3, a wide range of libraries could be integrated to enhance its functionality.

- PyGithub is a Python library build to access the GitHub API [32].
- GitPython is a Python library build to interact with Git repositories using a combination of python and git command implementation [26].

### 3.3.3 File Format of Result

The JavaScript Object Notation (**JSON**) [34] has been chosen as the file format for storing the results in this project. This is because JSON is supported in Python and it does not require complicated operations in Python to access the data. While various alternative data interchange formats such as the Extensible Markup Language (**XML**) [22] has its unique advantages, it is important to choose a data interchange format that consumes less resource and have lower processing time for a large amount of data. Since it has been proved that JSON has better performance than XML in terms of processing time and resource utilisation [52], it is considered that JSON would be the best option for this project.

## 3.4 Proposed Method

This project strongly emphasises the need for finding security issues in open source repositories by mining software repositories. While it might be impossible to discover the security patches in a repository through a single search, the problem could be solved using divide and conquer. The ideal concept of this project is to build a command-line interface program that is able to run two separate processes: the **mining** process and the **evaluation** process. The **mining** process takes a Git repository as input, searches through the commit log, and stores the list of commits that might potentially contain a patch in a JSON file. The **evaluation** process takes a JSON file as input, and check the code difference of every commit in the log file to identify the real patches.

## 3.5 Problems and Constraints

As mentioned in **Section 1.3**, the main challenges of this project are **data**, **misclassification**, **evaluation** and **time**. The subsequent challenge is the implementation difficulties, which the severity is dependent on the complexity of the problems and the resources available. It is also expected that some problems might not be solved and new problems could emerge in the course

of the project. This section will discuss the problems in detail and review several ways of mitigating them, as well as analysing the possible constraints that might affect the progress of the project.

### 3.5.1 Quality of Commit Messages

Although there are a lot of open source repositories available online, the majority of them does not have a formal guideline for the documenting the changes in the commit messages. As part of the **data** problem, the commit messages in the real-world repositories (**Section 3.7.1**) might have lower quality compared to a self-created repository. It has been reported that the terms *fix*, *add*, and *test* have the top average term frequency in the commit messages [1]. With these indistinct terms being widely used in the commit messages, the performance of the tool may drop on real-world repository test sets and it would require extra effort for finding the relevant vulnerability-fixing commits.

### 3.5.2 Results Evaluation Process

It is estimated that the **evaluation** process would be the biggest challenge of this project since it was regarded as a complicated and difficult area in previous researches. Moreover, this project plans to implement an automated version of the evaluation process, which will further increase the difficulty level. The implementation of automated evaluation is hard and it does not guarantee to provide a good result. It is also extremely challenging for the mining tool to work across repositories programmed in different programming languages. The constraint is that the tool has to be exhaustively tested to find the optimal threshold value and for it to be automated and produce good results. Although the tool might produce good results on some repositories, it does not indicate that the tool will produce consistent results on all repositories. To ensure the minimum quality of the results, one of the solutions might be using both automated method for basic filtering and a manual method for advance refinement.

### 3.5.3 Code Changes Analysis

As discussed in **Section 3.5.1**, the commit messages in real-world repositories will contain noise and inconsistency that might affect the results retrieved. Therefore, it is expected that the results will contain a certain amount of false positive commits. By analysing the code changes of the commits retrieved, the validity of a commit can be verified by finding the changes for vulnerable lines of code, as shown in **Figure 3.2**.

However, the step of correctly identifying the vulnerable lines of code is challenging as it varies with different programming languages. Firstly, different programming languages have different code syntax, and thus the code changes for addressing the same vulnerability might be different across different programming language. Secondly, the code changes of a commit only represent a small fragment of the whole source code, and there might be several code changes in different files that are addressing a same vulnerability. Simple source code analysis technique might not be sufficient to find the relationship between code changes in different files.

The screenshot shows a code diff for a file named `MySQLDatabase.java`. The diff highlights changes to line 52, where `Statement` is replaced by `PreparedStatement`. It also shows the removal of a vulnerable SQL query and its replacement with a safe query using a placeholder. The changes are as follows:

Line	Change	Code
52	-	<code>Statement statement = null;</code>
52	+	<code>PreparedStatement statement = null;</code>
53		<code>ResultSet resultset = null;</code>
54		<code>try {</code>
55	-	<code>statement = connection.createStatement();</code>
56	-	<code>String sql = "SELECT tag_name FROM tagPreset WHERE preset_ID = "</code>
57	-	<code>+ preset.getId();</code>
58	-	<code>resultset = statement.executeQuery(sql);</code>
55	+	<code>String sql = "SELECT tag_name FROM tagPreset WHERE preset_ID = ?";</code>
56	+	<code>statement = connection.prepareStatement(sql);</code>
57	+	<code>statement.setInt(1, preset.getId());</code>
58	+	<code>resultset = statement.executeQuery();</code>

**Figure 3.2:** Example of code changes to prevent SQL injection [23]

## 3.6 Testing

This section covers a brief overview of the testing stage. It will be necessary to consider some of the self-created test cases and scenarios in advance to find all possible bugs and flaws.

### 3.6.1 Unit Testing

Python provides a unit testing framework as part of its standard library, known as unittest [76], which offers a complete set of functions suffice to cover the unit testing of this project. Fundamental test cases include checking the functions for an expected result. Additional test cases are based on the functionality of the tool to cover every feature implemented.

Test Case #	Test Data	Expected Result	Actual Result	Status

**Table 3.3:** Documentation format of the unit testing

### 3.6.2 System Testing

After completing the unit testing, the mining tool has to be tested for its functional requirements, as mentioned in **Table 3.1**. It is expected that the program would not be able to handle complicated errors during the early implementation, and the project schedule would become an iterative process between implementation and testing. It is assumed that the testing stage would be the most time-consuming process in the whole project, thus it might be required to allocate more time and effort into this stage.

## 3.7 Evaluation

This section briefly discusses the approach to evaluate the mining tool on the real world projects to ensure that the requirements and criteria listed are practical and feasible.

### 3.7.1 Real-world Projects Evaluation

Real-world projects generally contain noise in their data due to inconsistency, incompleteness, and ambiguity [2], as shown in **Figure 2.1** and discussed in **Section 2.4.3**. Evaluating the mining tool on several real-world projects will test its ability of handling the noisy data. For the mining tool to be beneficial to the public, it must be able to produce results with a certain standard. This could be validated by verifying the accuracy and relevance of the results. It is presumed that the mining tool would only be suitable for a small set of repositories, and it might require comprehensive experiments of different configurations to achieve the best result.

Real-world projects including the Linux kernel [40], Apache HTTP Server [4], Apache Tomcat [5], GitLab Community Edition [25], Homebrew core [31], Nixpkgs [51] and Odoo [55] are a good starting point for this project as they all have a large number of commits. This approach is reasonable as larger repositories are more likely to contain vulnerability- fixing commits and have a higher standard or informative commit messages.

### 3.7.2 Quality Evaluation

Having completed the testing stage does not infer that the repository mining tool would be practical in a real-world usage. To ensure the feasibility of this project, the tool has to be assessed by defining and measuring the quality metrics listed below:

- **Relevance:** The measurement of the number of relevant commits retrieved when given a regular expression that represent the commit message pattern of a vulnerability.
- **Efficiency:** The total time taken required for the tool to complete the searching process.

### **3.8 Ethical Issues**

In this project, it has to be clearly declared that any known or unknown vulnerabilities found by the mining tool in any repositories will not be publicly disclosed without the permission of the original authors. The reason is that publishing the vulnerabilities publicly would make the softwares highly vulnerable to attackers [6], and it is recommended to wait for the official announcement from the software vendors.



# Chapter 4

## Progress

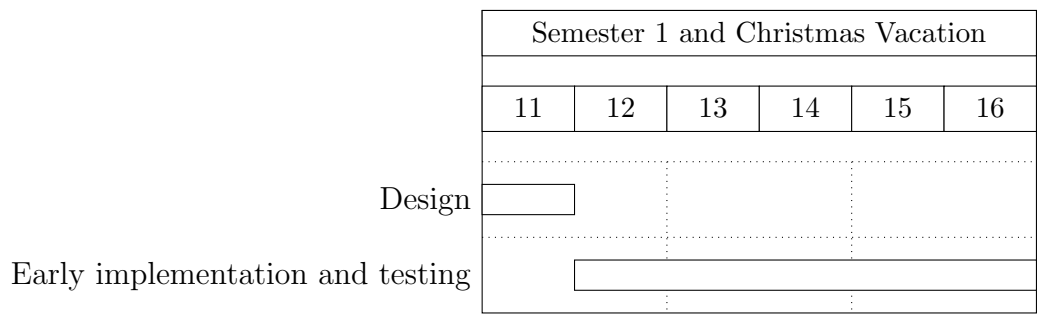
### 4.1 Main achievements to date

- Completed Literature Review and Requirements and Analysis
- Licensing issue considered.
- Several design problems have been identified. For example, Git repositories converted from Subversion generally do not have ‘master’ as their main branch name, thus extra command line options need to be provided.
- Considered which real-world repositories to be used in the starting point (**Section 3.7.1**).
- Very basic implementation such as mining commit messages and matching regular expressions.

# Chapter 5

## Project Plan

### 5.1 Semester 1 and Christmas Vacation

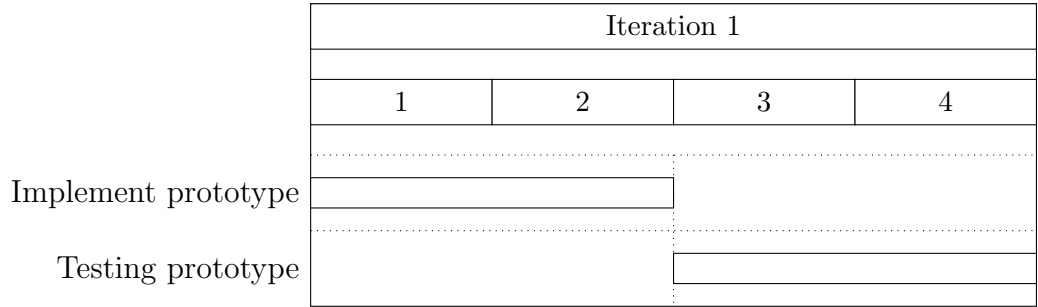


#### 5.1.1 Deliverables

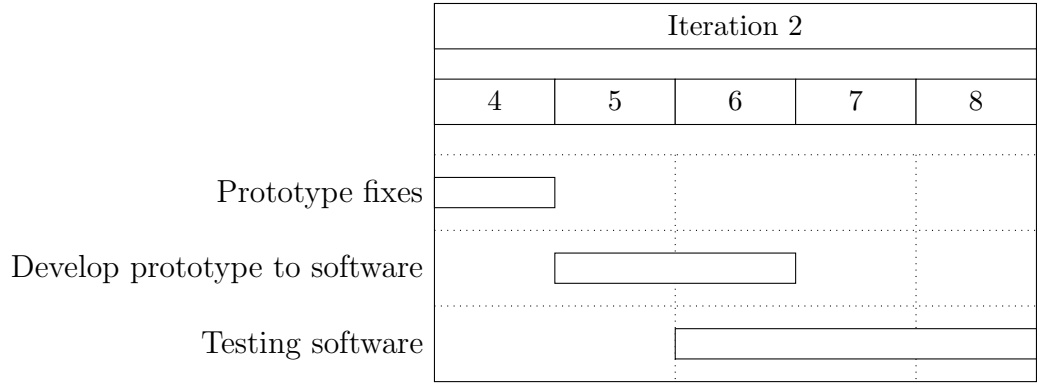
- Week 11:** It is hoped that there will be some design progress being made at the end of first semester. Otherwise, the progress might be delayed until the Christmas vacation.
- Christmas Vacation:** Regularly make progress on the design and implementation. If a great amount of progress could be achieved in this period, then more time could be allocated to testing and more iterations in the second semester.

5.2 Semester 2

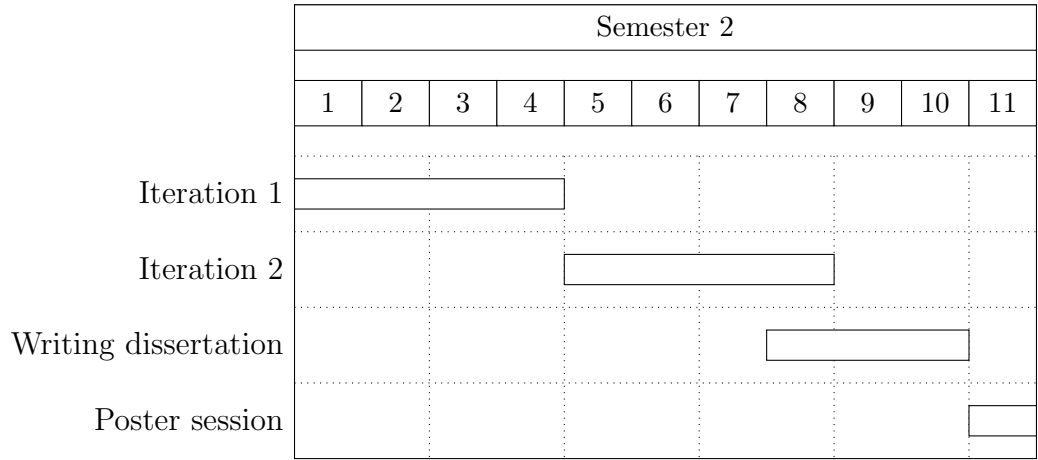
5.2.1 Iteration 1



5.2.2 Iteration 2



5.2.3 Semester 2 Overview



#### 5.2.4 Deliverables

- **Iteration 1:** Iteration 1 could be shorter or longer based on the amount of progress made during Christmas vacation. It is aimed to produce a working prototype in this stage.
- **Iteration 2:** Iteration 2 improves the prototype produced in iteration 1, and develop it into a fully working software based on the feedback given. In addition, further improvements or implementations could be made if the progress were ahead.
- **Easter vacation:** Could start writing the dissertation as part of iteration 1 and iteration 2. The Easter vacation will focus on finalising the software and dissertation.

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