Types of Algorithms

Algorithm classification

- Algorithms that use a similar problem-solving approach can be grouped together
- This classification scheme is neither exhaustive nor disjoint
- The purpose is not to be able to classify an algorithm as one type or another, but to highlight the various ways in which a problem can be attacked

A short list of categories

- Algorithm types we will consider include:
  - Simple recursive algorithms
  - Backtracking algorithms
  - Divide and conquer algorithms
  - Dynamic programming algorithms
  - Greedy algorithms
  - Branch and bound algorithms
  - Brute force algorithms
  - Randomized algorithms

Simple recursive algorithms I

- A simple recursive algorithm:
  - Solves the base cases directly
  - Recurs with a simpler subproblem
  - Does some extra work to convert the solution to the simpler subproblem into a solution to the given problem
- I call these “simple” because several of the other algorithm types are inherently recursive

Example recursive algorithms

- To count the number of elements in a list:
  - If the list is empty, return zero; otherwise,
  - Step past the first element, and count the remaining elements in the list
  - Add one to the result
- To test if a value occurs in a list:
  - If the list is empty, return false; otherwise,
  - If the first thing in the list is the given value, return true; otherwise
  - Step past the first element, and test whether the value occurs in the remainder of the list

Backtracking algorithms

- Backtracking algorithms are based on a depth-first recursive search
- A backtracking algorithm:
  - Tests to see if a solution has been found, and if so, returns it; otherwise
  - For each choice that can be made at this point,
    - Make that choice
    - Recur
    - If the recursion returns a solution, return it
  - If no choices remain, return failure

Example backtracking algorithm

- To color a map with no more than four colors:
  - color(Country n)
    - If all countries have been colored (n > number of countries) return success; otherwise,
    - For each color c of four colors,
      - If country n is not adjacent to a country that has been colored c
        - » Color country n with color c
        - » recursivly color country n+1
        - » If successful, return success
    - Return failure (if loop exits)

Divide and Conquer

- A divide and conquer algorithm consists of two parts:
  - Divide the problem into smaller subproblems of the same type, and solve these subproblems recursively
  - Combine the solutions to the subproblems into a solution to the original problem
- Traditionally, an algorithm is only called divide and conquer if it contains two or more recursive calls

Examples

- Quicksort:
  - Partition the array into two parts, and quicksort each of the parts
  - No additional work is required to combine the two sorted parts
- Mergesort:
  - Cut the array in half, and mergesort each half
  - Combine the two sorted arrays into a single sorted array by merging them

Binary tree lookup

- Here's how to look up something in a sorted binary tree:
  - Compare the key to the value in the root
    - If the two values are equal, report success
    - If the key is less, search the left subtree
    - If the key is greater, search the right subtree
- This is *not* a divide and conquer algorithm because, although there are two recursive calls, only one is used at each level of the recursion

Fibonacci numbers

- To find the nth Fibonacci number:
  - If n is zero or one, return one; otherwise,
  - Compute fibonacci(n-1) and fibonacci(n-2)
  - Return the sum of these two numbers
- This is an expensive algorithm
  - It requires O(fibonacci(n)) time
  - This is equivalent to exponential time, that is, $O(2^n)$

Dynamic programming algorithms

- A dynamic programming algorithm remembers past results and uses them to find new results
- Dynamic programming is generally used for optimization problems
  - Multiple solutions exist, need to find the “best” one
  - Requires “optimal substructure” and “overlapping subproblems”
    - Optimal substructure: Optimal solution contains optimal solutions to subproblems
    - Overlapping subproblems: Solutions to subproblems can be stored and reused in a bottom-up fashion
- This differs from Divide and Conquer, where subproblems generally need not overlap

Fibonacci numbers again

- To find the nth Fibonacci number:
  - If n is zero or one, return one; otherwise,
  - Compute, *or look up in a table,* `fibonacci(n-1)` and `fibonacci(n-2)`
  - Find the sum of these two numbers
  - Store the result in a table and return it
- Since finding the nth Fibonacci number involves finding all smaller Fibonacci numbers, the second recursive call has little work to do
- The table may be preserved and used again later

Greedy algorithms

- An optimization problem is one in which you want to find, not just *a* solution, but the *best* solution
- A "greedy algorithm" sometimes works well for optimization problems
- A greedy algorithm works in phases: At each phase:
  - You take the best you can get right now, without regard for future consequences
  - You hope that by choosing a *local* optimum at each step, you will end up at a *global* optimum

Example: Counting money

- Suppose you want to count out a certain amount of money, using the fewest possible bills and coins
- A greedy algorithm would do this would be:
  At each step, take the largest possible bill or coin that does not overshoot
  - Example: To make $6.39, you can choose:
    - a $5 bill
    - a $1 bill, to make $6
    - a 25¢ coin, to make $6.25
    - A 10¢ coin, to make $6.35
    - four 1¢ coins, to make $6.39
- For US money, the greedy algorithm always gives the optimum solution

A failure of the greedy algorithm

- In some (fictional) monetary system, “krons” come in 1 kron, 7 kron, and 10 kron coins
- Using a greedy algorithm to count out 15 krons, you would get
  - A 10 kron piece
  - Five 1 kron pieces, for a total of 15 krons
  - This requires six coins
- A better solution would be to use two 7 kron pieces and one 1 kron piece
  - This only requires three coins
- The greedy algorithm results in a solution, but not in an optimal solution

Branch and bound algorithms

- Branch and bound algorithms are generally used for optimization problems
  - As the algorithm progresses, a tree of subproblems is formed
  - The original problem is considered the “root problem”
  - A method is used to construct an upper and lower bound for a given problem
  - At each node, apply the bounding methods
    - If the bounds match, it is deemed a feasible solution to that particular subproblem
    - If bounds do *not* match, partition the problem represented by that node, and make the two subproblems into children nodes
  - Continue, using the best known feasible solution to trim sections of the tree, until all nodes have been solved or trimmed

Example branch and bound algorithm

- Travelling salesman problem: A salesman has to visit each of n cities (at least) once each, and wants to minimize total distance travelled
  - Consider the root problem to be the problem of finding the shortest route through a set of cities visiting each city once
  - Split the node into two child problems:
    - Shortest route visiting city A first
    - Shortest route *not* visiting city A first
  - Continue subdividing similarly as the tree grows

Brute force algorithm

- A brute force algorithm simply tries *all* possibilities until a satisfactory solution is found
  - Such an algorithm can be:
    - Optimizing: Find the *best* solution. This may require finding all solutions, or if a value for the best solution is known, it may stop when any best solution is found
      - Example: Finding the best path for a travelling salesman
    - Satisficing: Stop as soon as a solution is found that is *good enough*
      - Example: Finding a travelling salesman path that is within 10% of optimal

Improving brute force algorithms

- Often, brute force algorithms require exponential time
- Various *heuristics* and *optimizations* can be used
  - Heuristic: A “rule of thumb” that helps you decide which possibilities to look at first
  - Optimization: In this case, a way to eliminate certain possibilites without fully exploring them

Randomized algorithms

- A randomized algorithm uses a random number at least once during the computation to make a decision
  - Example: In Quicksort, using a random number to choose a pivot
  - Example: Trying to factor a large prime by choosing random numbers as possible divisors

The End