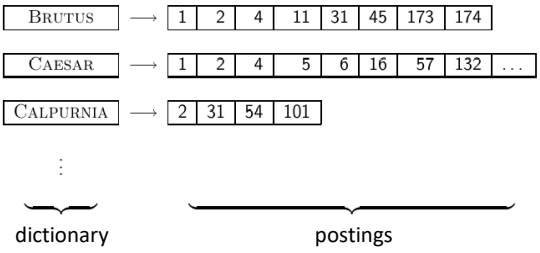
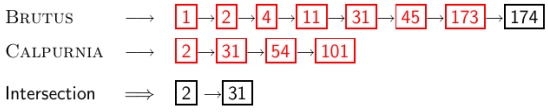
Inverted Index

For each term *t*, we store a list of all documents that contain *t*.



Intersecting two posting lists



Westlaw: Example queries

Information need: Information on the legal theories involved in preventing the disclosure of trade secrets by employees formerly employed by a competing company *Query*: "trade secret" /s disclos! /s prevent /s employe! *Information need*: Requirements

for disabled people to be able to access a workplace Query: disab! /p access! /s work-site work-place (employment /3 place)

Information need: Cases about a host's responsibility for drunk guests *Query*: host! /p (responsib! liab!) /p (intoxicat! drunk!) /p guest

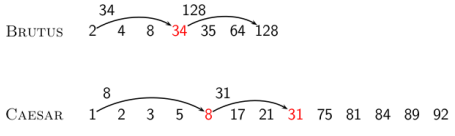
Does Google use the Boolean model?

- On Google, the default interpretation of a query $[w_1 w_2 \ldots w_n]$ is w_1 AND w_2 AND . . .AND w_n
- Cases where you get hits that do not contain one of the *wi :*
  - anchor text
  - page contains variant of w_i (morphology, spelling correction, synonym)
  - long queries (*n* large)
  - boolean expression generates very few hits
- Simple Boolean vs. Ranking of result set
  - Simple Boolean retrieval returns matching documents in no particular order.
  - Google (and most well designed Boolean engines) rank the result set – they rank good hits (according to some estimator of relevance) higher than bad hits.

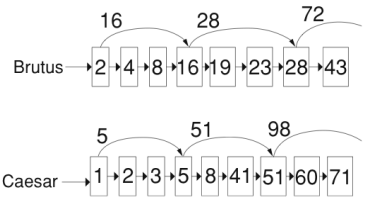
Skip pointers

- Skip pointers allow us to skip postings that will not figure in the search results.
- This makes intersecting postings lists more efficient.
- Some postings lists contain several million entries – so efficiency can be an issue even if basic intersection is linear.
- Where do we put skip pointers?
- How do we make sure intersection results are correct?

Basic idea



Skip lists: Larger example



Intersection with skip pointers

```
INTERSECTWITHSKIPS(p1, p2)
 1  answer ← ⟨ ⟩
 2  while p1 ≠ NIL and p2 ≠ NIL
 3  do if docID(p1) = docID(p2)
 4        then ADD(answer, docID(p1))
 5             p1 ← next(p1)
 6             p2 ← next(p2)
 7        else if docID(p1) < docID(p2)
 8                then if hasSkip(p1) and (docID(skip(p1)) ≤ docID(p2))
 9                        then while hasSkip(p1) and (docID(skip(p1)) ≤ docID(p2))
10                                do p1 ← skip(p1)
11                        else p1 ← next(p1)
12                else if hasSkip(p2) and (docID(skip(p2)) ≤ docID(p1))
13                        then while hasSkip(p2) and (docID(skip(p2)) ≤ docID(p1))
14                                do p2 ← skip(p2)
15                        else p2 ← next(p2)
16  return answer
```


Where do we place skips?

- Tradeoff: number of items skipped vs. frequency skip can be taken
- More skips: Each skip pointer skips only a few items, but we can frequently use it.
- Fewer skips: Each skip pointer skips many items, but we can not use it very often.

Where do we place skips? (cont)

- Simple heuristic: for postings list of length *P,* use $\sqrt{P}$ evenly-spaced skip pointers.
- This ignores the distribution of query terms.
- Easy if the index is static; harder in a dynamic environment because of updates.
- How much do skip pointers help?
- They used to help a lot.
- With today's fast CPUs, they don't help that much anymore.

Phrase queries

- We want to answer a query such as [stanford university] – as a phrase.
- Thus *The inventor Stanford Ovshinsky never went to university* should not be a match.
- The concept of phrase query has proven easily understood by users.
- About 10% of web queries are phrase queries.
- Consequence for inverted index: it no longer suffices to store docIDs in postings lists.
- Two ways of extending the inverted index:
  - biword index
  - positional index

Biword indexes

- Index every consecutive pair of terms in the text as a phrase.
- For example, *Friends, Romans, Countrymen* would generate two biwords: *"friends romans"* and *"romans countrymen"*
- Each of these biwords is now a vocabulary term.
- Two-word phrases can now easily be answered.

Longer phrase queries

- A long phrase like *"stanford university palo alto"* can be represented as the Boolean query "STANFORD UNIVERSITY" AND "UNIVERSITY PALO" AND "PALO ALTO"
- We need to do post-filtering of hits to identify subset that actually contains the 4-word phrase.

Extended biwords

- Parse each document and perform part-of-speech tagging
- Bucket the terms into (say) nouns (N) and articles/prepositions (X)
- Now deem any string of terms of the form NX*N to be an *extended biword*
- Examples: catcher in the rye

  N X X N

  king of Denmark

  N X N
- Include extended biwords in the term vocabulary
- Queries are processed accordingly

Issues with biword indexes

- Why are biword indexes rarely used?
- False positives, as noted above
- Index blowup due to very large term vocabulary

Positional indexes

- Positional indexes are a more efficient alternative to biword indexes.
- Postings lists in a nonpositional index: each posting is just a docID
- Postings lists in a positional index: each posting is a docID and a list of positions

Positional indexes: Example

Query: *"to*$_1$ *be*$_2$ *or*$_3$ *not*$_4$ *to*$_5$ *be*$_6$*"* TO, 993427:

‹ 1: ‹7, 18, 33, 72, 86, 231›;
2: ‹1, 17, 74, 222, 255›;
4: ‹8, 16, 190, 429, 433›;
5: ‹363, 367›;
7: ‹13, 23, 191›; . . . ›

BE, 178239:

‹ 1: ‹17, 25›;
4: ‹17, 191, 291, 430, 434›;
5: ‹14, 19, 101›; . . . › Document 4 is a match!

Proximity search

- We just saw how to use a positional index for phrase searches.
- We can also use it for proximity search.
- For example: employment /4 place
- Find all documents that contain EMPLOYMENT and PLACE within 4 words of each other.
- *Employment agencies that place healthcare workers are seeing growth* is a hit.
- *Employment agencies that have learned to adapt now place healthcare workers* is not a hit.

Proximity search

- Use the positional index
- Simplest algorithm: look at cross-product of positions of (i) EMPLOYMENT in document and (ii) PLACE in document
- Very inefficient for frequent words, especially stop words
- Note that we want to return the actual matching positions, not just a list of documents.
- This is important for dynamic summaries etc.

"Proximity" intersection

```
POSITIONALINTERSECT(p1, p2, k)
 1  answer ← ⟨ ⟩
 2  while p1 ≠ NIL and p2 ≠ NIL
 3  do if docID(p1) = docID(p2)
 4        then l ← ⟨ ⟩
 5             pp1 ← positions(p1)
 6             pp2 ← positions(p2)
 7             while pp1 ≠ NIL
 8             do while pp2 ≠ NIL
 9                do if |pos(pp1) − pos(pp2)| ≤ k
10                      then ADD(l, pos(pp2))
11                      else if pos(pp2) > pos(pp1)
12                              then break
13                   pp2 ← next(pp2)
14                while l ≠ ⟨ ⟩ and |l[0] − pos(pp1)| > k
15                do DELETE(l[0])
16                for each ps ∈ l
17                do ADD(answer, ⟨docID(p1), pos(pp1), ps⟩)
18                pp1 ← next(pp1)
19             p1 ← next(p1)
20             p2 ← next(p2)
21        else if docID(p1) < docID(p2)
22                then p1 ← next(p1)
23                else p2 ← next(p2)
24  return answer
```


Combination scheme

- Biword indexes and positional indexes can be profitably combined.
- Many biwords are extremely frequent: Michael Jackson, Britney Spears etc
- For these biwords, increased speed compared to positional postings intersection is substantial.
- Combination scheme: Include frequent biwords as vocabulary terms in the index. Do all other phrases by positional intersection.
- Williams et al. (2004) evaluate a more sophisticated mixed indexing scheme. Faster than a positional index, at a cost of 26% more space for index.

"Positional" queries on Google

- For web search engines, positional queries are much more expensive than regular Boolean queries.
- Let's look at the example of phrase queries.
- Why are they more expensive than regular Boolean queries?
- Can you demonstrate on Google that phrase queries are more expensive than Boolean queries?