Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Voter ID Management System provides a user-friendly, interactive Menu Driven Interface (MDI). All data is stored in files for persistence. The mini project uses 2 files: An Index file, to store the primary index, a Data file, to store voter records like voter ID, name, address, dob etc. and a secondary index file.

1.1 Introduction to File Structure

A file structure is a combination of representations for data in files and of operations for accessing the data. A file structure allows to read, write, and modify data. It might also support finding the data that matches some search criteria or reading through the data in some particular order. An improvement in file structure design may make an application hundreds of times faster. The details of the representation of the data and the implementation of the operations determine the efficiency of the file structure for particular applications.

1.1.1 History

Early work with files presumed that files were on tape, since most files were. Access was sequential, and the cost of access grew in direct proportion, to the size of the file. As files grew intolerably large for unaided sequential access and as storage devices such as hard disks became available, indexes were added to files.

The indexes made it possible to keep a list of keys and pointers in a smaller file that could be searched more quickly. With key and pointer, the user had direct access to the large, primary file. But simple indexes had some of the same sequential flaws as the data file, and as the indexes grew, they too became difficult to manage, especially for dynamic files in which the set of key changes. In 1963, researches developed and elegant self adjusting binary tree structure, called AVL tree, for data in memory, with a balanced binary tree, dozens of accesses were required to find a record in even moderate-sized files.

A method was needed to keep a tree balanced when each node of thee tree was not a single record, as in a binary tree, but a file block containing dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of records took 10 years until a solution emerged in the form of a B-Tree.

Whereas AVL trees grow from the top down as records were added, B-Trees grew from the bottom up. B-Trees provided excellent access performance, but there was a cost: no longer could a file be accessed sequentially with efficiency. The problem was solved by adding a linked list structure at the bottom level of the B-Tree. The combination of a B-Tree and a sequential linked list is called a B+ tree.

B-Trees and B+ trees provide access times that grow in proportion to $\log_k N$, where N is the number of entries in the file and k is the number of entries indexed in a single block of the B+ Tree structure. This means that B+ Trees can guarantee that you can find 1 file entry among millions with only 3 or 4 trips to the disk. Further, B+Trees guarantee that as you add and delete entries, performance stays about the same.

Hashing is a good way to get what we want with a single request, with files that do not change size greatly over time. Hashed indexes were used to provide fast access to files. But until recently, hashing did not work well with volatile, dynamic files. Extendible dynamic hashing can retrieve information with 1 or at most 2 disk accesses, no matter how big the file became.

1.1.2 About the File

When we talk about a file on disk or tape, we refer to a particular collection of bytes stored there. A file, when the word is used in this sense, physically exists. A disk drive may contain hundreds, even thousands of these physical files.

From the standpoint of a system program, a file is somewhat like a telephone line connection to a telephone network. The program can receive bytes through this phone line or send bytes down it, but it knows nothing about where these bytes come from or where they go. The program knows only about its end of the line. Even though there may be thousands of physical files on a disk, a single program is usually limited to the use of only about 20 files. A file is a operation of computer which stores data, information, message, settings, or commands used with the computer program. It is created using system program on the computer.

The application program relies on the OS to take care of the details of the telephone switching system. It could be that bytes coming down the line into the program originate from a physical file they come from the keyboard or some other input device. Similarly, bytes the program sends down the line might end up in a file, or they could appear on the terminal screen or some other output device. Although the program doesn't

know where the bytes are coming from or where they are going, it does know which line it is using. This line is usually referred to as the logical file, to distinguish it from the physical files on the disk or tape.

1.1.3 Various Kinds of storage of Fields and Records

A field is the smallest, logically meaningful, unit of information in a file.

Field Structures

The four most common methods as shown in Fig. 1.1 of adding structure to files to maintain the identity of fields are:

- Force the fields into a predictable length.
- Begin each field with a length indicator.
- Place a delimiter at the end of each field to separate it from the next field.
- Use a"keyword=value" expression to identify each field and its contents.

Method 1: Fix the Length of Fields

In the above example, each field is a character array that can hold a string value of some maximum size. The size of the array is 1 larger than the longest string it can hold. Simple arithmetic is sufficient to recover data from the original fields.

The disadvantage of this approach is adding all the padding required to bring the fields up to a fixed length, makes the file much larger. We encounter problems when data is too long to fit into the allocated amount of space. We can solve this by fixing all the fields at lengths that are large enough to cover all cases, but this makes the problem of wasted space in files even worse. Hence, this approach isn't used with data with large amount of variability in length of fields, but where every field is fixed in length if there is very little variation in field lengths.

Method 2: Begin Each Field with a Length Indicator

We can count to the end of a field by storing the field length just ahead of the field. If the fields are not too long (less than 256 bytes), it is possible to store the length in a single byte at the start of each field. We refer to these fields as length-based.

Method 3: Separate the Fields with Delimiters

We can preserve the identity of fields by separating them with delimiters. All we need to do is choose some special character or sequence of characters that will not appear within

a field and then insert that delimiter into the file after writing each field. White-space characters (blank, new line, tab) or the vertical bar character, can be used as delimiters.

Method 4: Use a "Keyword=Value" Expression to Identify Fields

This has an advantage the others don't. It is the first structure in which a field provides information about itself. Such self-describing structures can be very useful tools for organizing files in many applications. It is easy to tell which fields are contained in a file

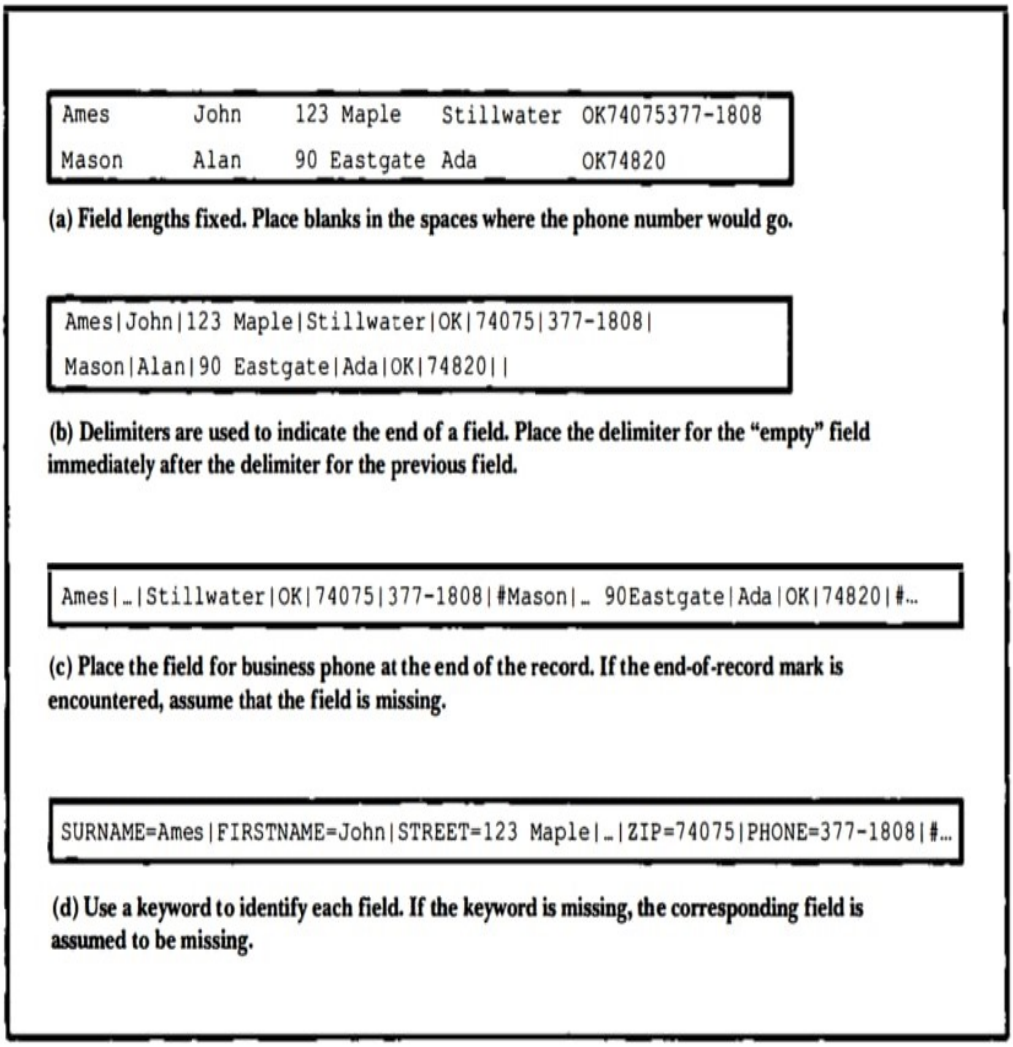

Figure 1.1 Four methods for field structures

Even if we don't know ahead of time which fields the file is supposed to contain. It is also a good format for dealing with missing fields. If a field is missing, this format makes it obvious, because the keyword is simply not there. It is helpful to use this in combination with delimiters, to show division between each value and the keyword for the following field. But this also wastes a lot of space: 50% or more of the file's space could be taken up by the keywords.

A record can be defined as a set of fields that belong together when the file is viewed in terms of a higher level of organization.

Record Structures

The five most often used methods for organizing records of a file are

- Require the records to be predictable number of bytes in length.
- Require the records to be predictable number of fields in length.
- Begin each record with a length indicator consisting of a count of the number of bytes that the record contains.
- Use a second file to keep track of the beginning byte address for each record.
- Place a delimiter at the end of each record to separate it from the next record.

Method 1: Make the Records a Predictable Number of Bytes (Fixed-Length Record)

A fixed-length record file is one in which each record contains the same number of bytes. In the field and record structure shown, we have a fixed number of fields, each with a predetermined length, that combine to make a fixed-length record.

Fixing the number of bytes in a record does not imply that the size or number of fields in the record must be fixed. Fixed-length records are often used as containers to hold variable numbers of variable-length fields. It is also possible to mix fixed and variable-length fields within a record.

Method 2: Make Records a Predictable Number of Fields

Rather than specify that each record in a file contains some fixed number of bytes, we can specify that it will contain a fixed number of fields.

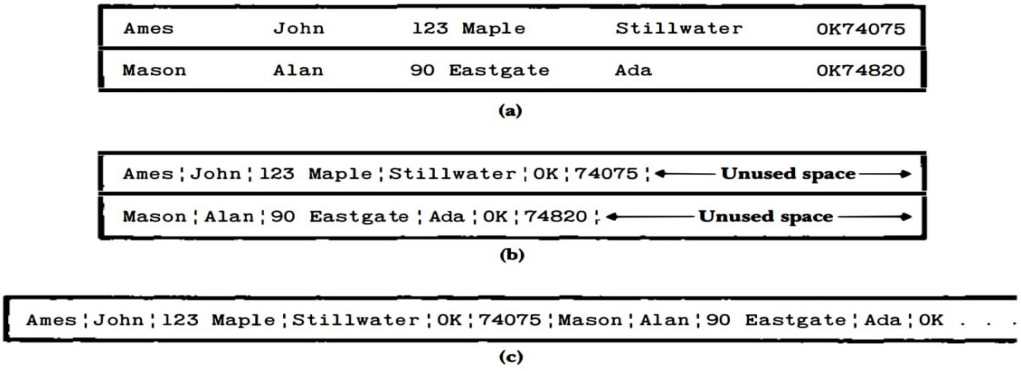

Figure 1.2 Making Records Predictable number of Bytes and Fields

Method 3: Begin Each Record with a Length Indicator

We can communicate the length of records by beginning each record with a filed containing an integer that indicates how many bytes there are in the rest of the record. This is commonly used to handle variable-length records.

Method 4: Use an Index to Keep Track of Addresses

We can use an index to keep a byte offset for each record in the original file. The byte offset allows us to find the beginning of each successive record and compute the length of each record. We look up the position of a record in the index, then seek to the record in the data file.

Method 5: Place a Delimiter at the End of Each Record

It is analogous to keeping the fields distinct. As with fields, the delimiter character must not get in the way of processing. A common choice of a record delimiter for files that contain readable text is the end-of-line character (carriage return/ new-line pair or, on Unix systems, just a new line character: '\n'.

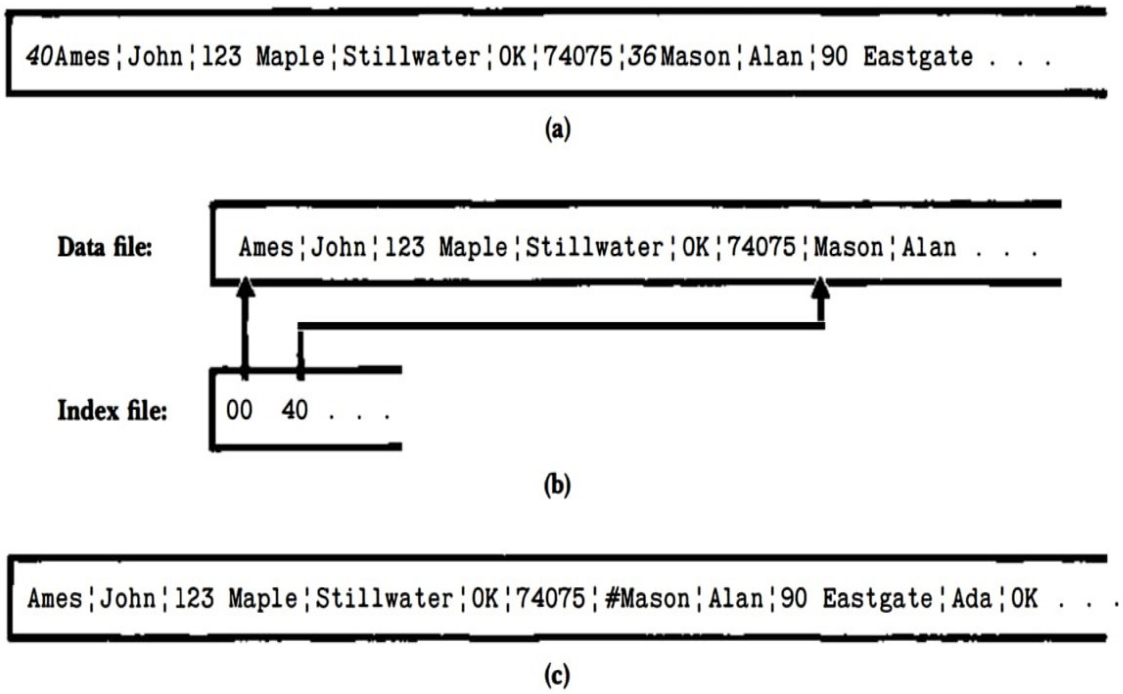

Figure 1.3 Using Length Indicator, Index and Record Delimiters

1.1.4 Application of File Structure

Relative to other parts of a computer, disks are slow. 1 can pack thousands of megabytes on a disk that fits into a notebook computer.

The time it takes to get information from even relatively slow electronic random access memory (RAM) is about 120 nanoseconds. Getting the same information from a typical disk takes 30 milliseconds. So, the disk access is a quarter of a million times longer than a memory access. Hence, disks are very slow compared to memory. On the other hand, disks provide enormous capacity at much less cost than memory. They also keep the information stored on them when they are turned off.