Introduction to

Information Retrieval

Lecture 9: Index Compression

This lecture

BRUTUS	⟶	1	2	4	11	31	45	173	174	
CAESAR	⟶	1	2	4	5	6	16	57	132	...
CALPURNIA	⟶	2	31	54	101					

- Collection statistics in more detail
  - How big are the dictionary and postings likely to be, for a given text documents collection?
- Dictionary compression
- Postings compression

Why compression (in general)?

- Use less disk space
  - Saves a little money
- Keep more stuff in memory
  - Increases speed due to caching of more data
- Increase speed of data transfer from disk to memory
  - [read compressed data | decompress] is faster than [read uncompressed data]
  - Premise: Decompression algorithms are fast
    - True of the decompression algorithms we use

Why compression for inverted indexes?

- Dictionary
  - Make it small enough to keep in main memory
  - Make it so small that you can keep some postings lists in main memory too
- Postings file(s)
  - Reduce disk space needed
  - Decrease time needed to read postings lists from disk
  - Large search engines keep a significant part of the postings in memory (compression lets you keep more in memory)
- We will devise various IR-specific compression schemes

Sample text collection: Reuters RCV1

symbol	statistic	value
N	documents	800,000
L	avg. # tokens per doc	200
M	terms (= word types)	~400,000
	avg. # bytes per token (incl. spaces/punct.)	6
	avg. # bytes per token (without spaces/punct.)	4.5
	avg. # bytes per term	7.5
	non-positional postings	100,000,000

Observations

- Preprocessing greatly affects the size of dictionary and number of postings
  - Stemming, case folding, stop word removal
- Percentage reduction can be different based on properties of the collections
  - E.g., lemmatizer for French reduces dictionary size much more than Porter stemmer for English

Index parameters vs. what we index
(details in *IIR* book, Table 5.1)

size of	word types (terms)			non-positional postings			positional postings		
	dictionary			non-positional index			positional index		
	Size (K)	∆%	cumul %	Size (K)	∆ %	cumul %	Size (K)	∆ %	cumul %
Unfiltered	484			109,971			197,879		
No numbers	474	-2	-2	100,680	-8	-8	179,158	-9	-9
Case folding	392	-17	-19	96,969	-3	-12	179,158	0	-9
30 stopwords	391	-0	-19	83,390	-14	-24	121,858	-31	-38
150 stopwords	391	-0	-19	67,002	-30	-39	94,517	-47	-52
stemming	322	-17	-33	63,812	-4	-42	94,517	0	-52

Exercise: give intuitions for all the ‘0’ entries. Why do some zero entries correspond to big deltas in other columns?

Lossless vs. lossy compression

- Lossless compression: All information is preserved.
- Lossy compression: Discard some information
  - Makes sense when the discarded information is unlikely to be ever used by the IR system
- Several of the preprocessing steps can be viewed as lossy compression: case folding, stop words, stemming, number elimination.

Vocabulary vs. collection size

- How big is the term vocabulary?
  - That is, how many distinct words are likely to be present in a corpus/document collection?

- Can we assume an upper bound?
- In practice, the vocabulary will keep growing with the collection size

Vocabulary vs. collection size

- Heaps' law: $M = kT^b$
- M is the size of the vocabulary, T is the number of tokens in the collection
- Typical values: $30 \le k \le 100$ and $b \approx 0.5$
- In a log-log plot of vocabulary size M vs. T, Heaps' law predicts a line with slope about ½
  - It is the simplest possible relationship between the two in log-log space
  - An empirical finding ("empirical law")

Heaps' Law

Fig 5.1 p81

For RCV1, the dashed line

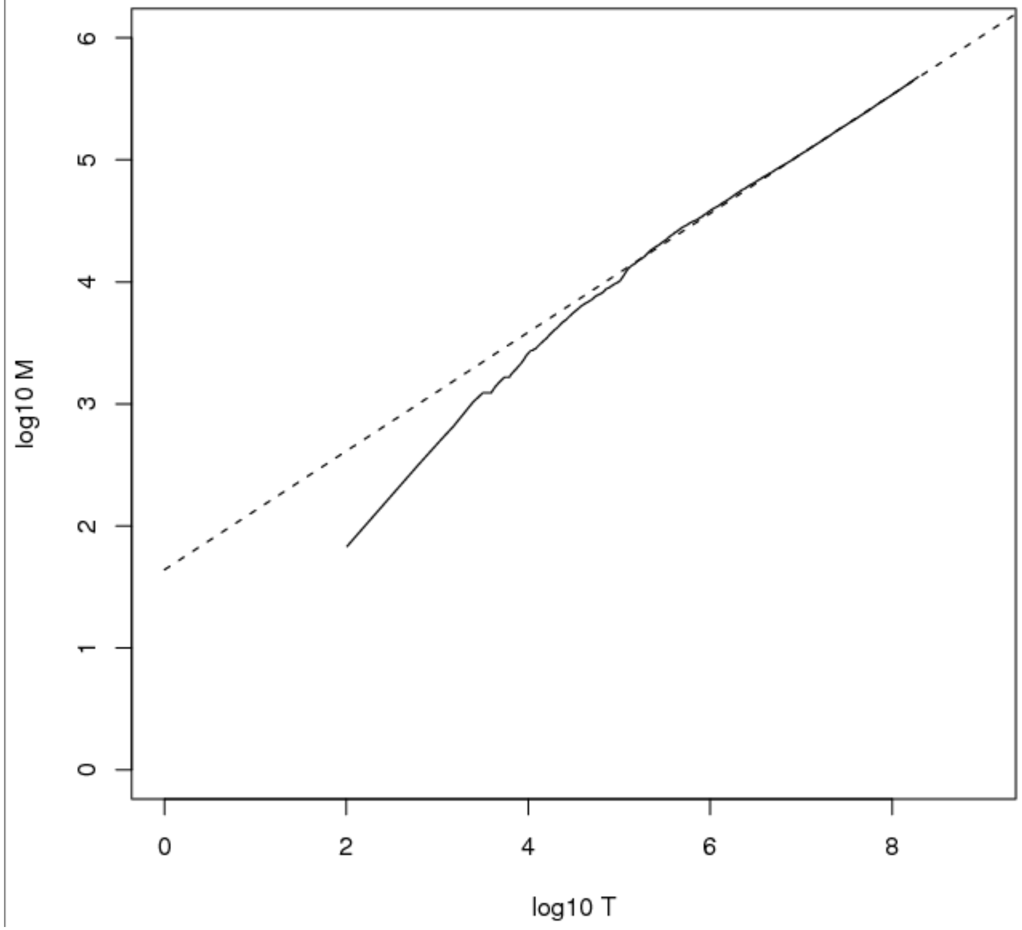
$\log_{10} M = 0.49 \log_{10} T + 1.64$

is the best least squares fit.

Thus, $M = 10^{1.64} T^{0.49}$ so $k = 10^{1.64} \approx 44$ and $b = 0.49$.

Good empirical fit for Reuters RCV1 !

For first 1,000,020 tokens, law predicts 38,323 terms; actually, 38,365 terms



Heap's Law suggests that

- The size of the dictionary is quite large for large collections
- The dictionary continues to increase with more documents in the collection, rather than a maximum vocabulary size being reached

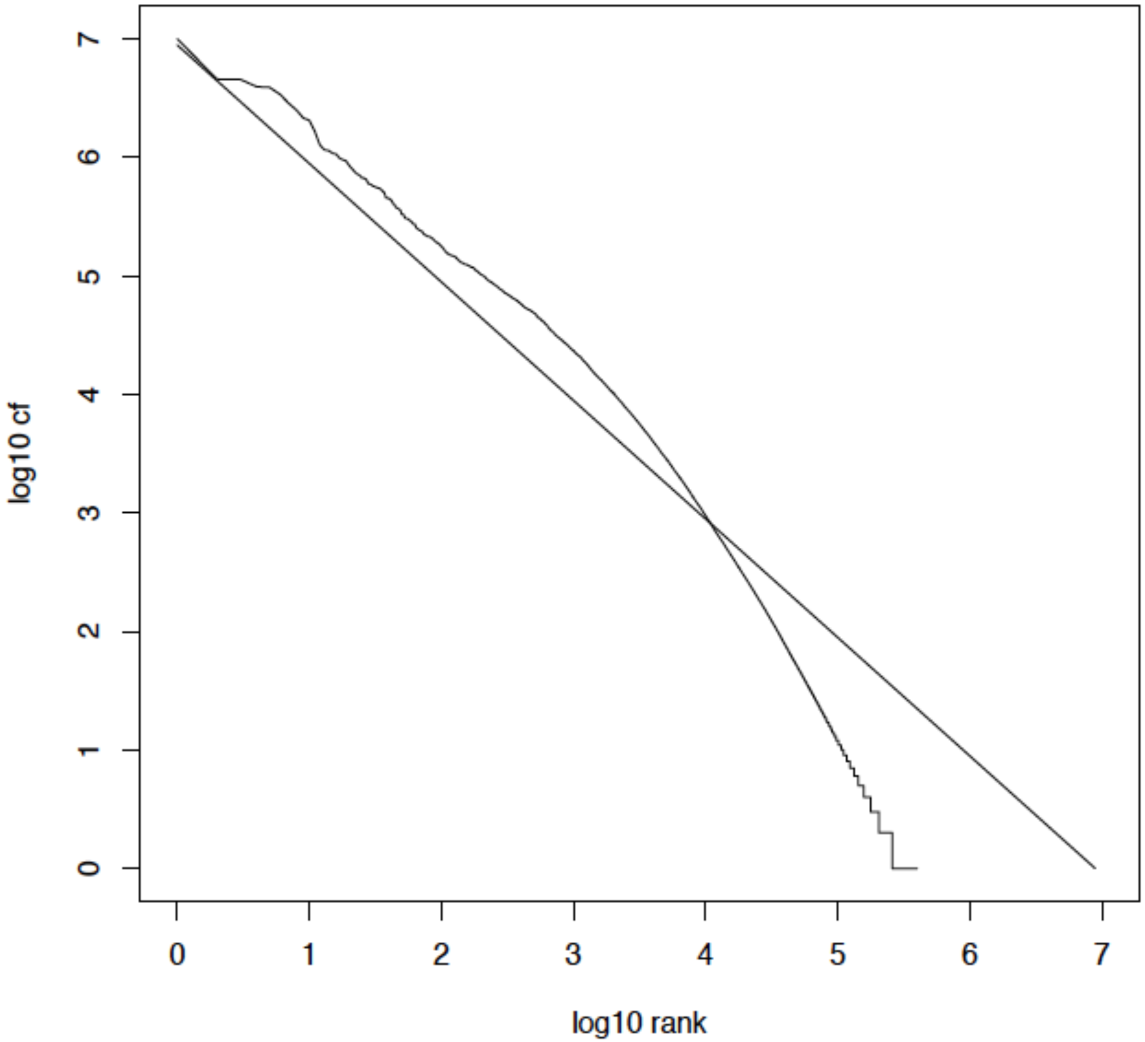
Zipf's law

- Heaps' law gives the vocabulary size in collections.
- We also study the relative frequencies of terms.
- *In natural language, there are a few very frequent terms and very many very rare terms.*
- Zipf's law: The *i*-th most frequent term has frequency proportional to $1/i$.
- $\mathrm{cf}_i \propto 1/i = K/i$ where K is a normalizing constant
- cf_i is collection frequency: the number of occurrences of the term t_i in the collection.

Zipf's Law consequences

- If the most frequent term (*the*) occurs cf_1 times
  - then the second most frequent term (*of*) occurs $cf_1/2$ times
  - the third most frequent term (*and*) occurs $cf_1/3$ times …
- Equivalent: $cf_i = K/i$ where K is a normalizing factor, so
  - $\log cf_i = \log K - \log i$
  - Linear relationship between $\log cf_i$ and $\log i$
- Another power law relationship

Zipf's law for Reuters RCV1



Compression

- Now, we will consider compressing the space for the dictionary and postings
  - Basic Boolean index only
  - No study of positional indexes, etc.

- We will consider compression schemes
  - Dictionary compression
  - Postings list compression

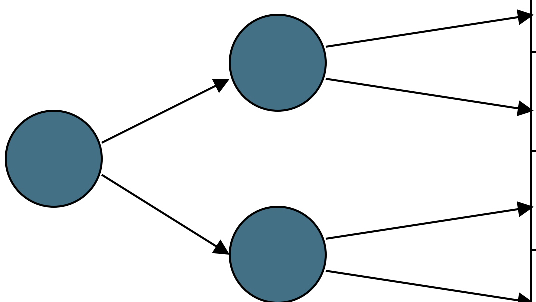
DICTIONARY COMPRESSION

Why compress the dictionary?

- Search begins with the dictionary
- We want to keep it in memory
- Memory footprint: competition with other applications
- Embedded/mobile devices may have very little memory
- Even if the dictionary isn't in memory, we want it to be small for a fast search startup time
- So, compressing the dictionary is important

Dictionary storage - first cut

- Array of fixed-width entries
  - ~400,000 terms; 28 bytes/term = 11.2 MB.



Terms	Freq.	Postings ptr.
a	656,265	
aachen	65	
….	….	
zulu	221	

Dictionary search structure

20 bytes for each term

4 bytes each

Fixed-width terms are wasteful

- Most of the bytes in the **Term** column are wasted – we allot 20 bytes even for 1 letter terms.
  - And we still can't handle *terms with more than 20 chars*

- Written English averages ~4.5 characters/word.
- Ave. dictionary word in English: ~8 characters
  - How do we use ~8 characters per dictionary term?
- Short words dominate token counts but not type average.

Compressing the term list: Approach 1: Dictionary-as-a-String

- Store dictionary as a (long) string of characters:
  - Pointer to next word shows end of current word
  - Hope to save up to 60% of dictionary space.

….systilesyzygeticsyzygialsyzygyszaibelyiteszczecinszomo….

Freq.	Postings ptr.	Term ptr.
33		
29		
44		
126		

Total string length = 400K x 8B = 3.2MB

Pointers resolve 3.2M positions: $\log_2 3.2M$ = 22bits = 3bytes

Space for dictionary as a string

- 4 bytes per term for Freq.
- 4 bytes per term for pointer to Postings.
- 3 bytes per term pointer
- Avg. 8 bytes per term in term string
- 400K terms x 19 ⇒ 7.6 MB (against 11.2MB for fixed width)

Now avg. 11 bytes/term, not 20.

Approach 2: Blocking

- Store pointers to every *k*-th term string.
  - Example below: *k*=4.
- Need to store term lengths (1 extra byte)

….*7systile9syzygetic8syzygial6syzygy11szaibelyite8szczecin9szomo*….

Freq.	Postings ptr.	Term ptr.
33		
29		
44		
126		
7		

Save 9 bytes on 3 pointers.

Lose 4 bytes on term lengths.

Blocking

- Group terms into blocks, each having k terms
- Store a term pointer only for first term of each block
- Store the length of each term as one additional byte at the beginning of each term
- Search for terms in the compressed dictionary
  - Locate the term’s block by binary search
  - Then locate term’s position within the block by linear search within the block
- By increasing block size k: tradeoff between better compression and speed of term lookup

Net saving

- Example for block size $k = 4$
- Where we used 3 bytes/pointer without blocking
  - 3 x 4 = 12 bytes,

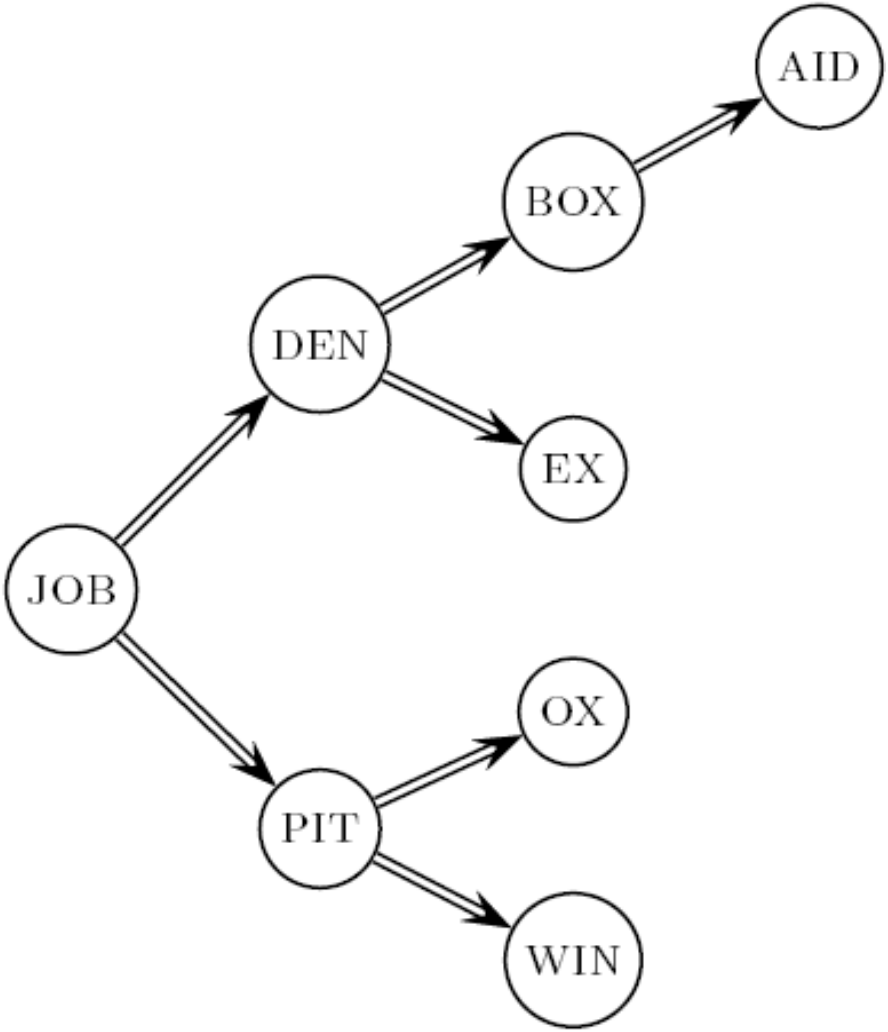
now we use 3 + 4 = 7 bytes.

Saved another ~0.5MB. This reduces the size of the dictionary from 7.6 MB to 7.1 MB.
We can save more with larger *k*.

Why not go with larger *k*?

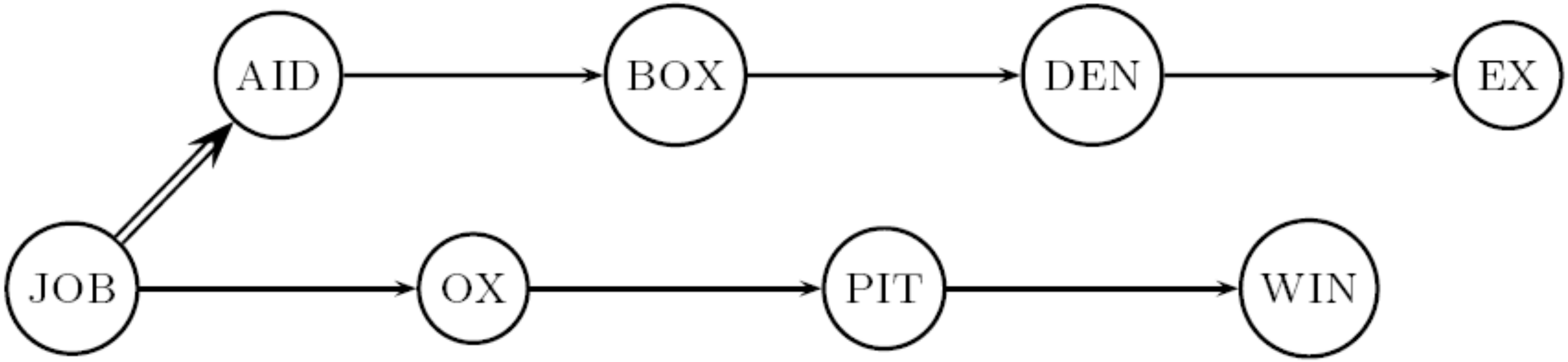
Dictionary search without blocking

- Assuming each dictionary term equally likely in query (not really so in practice!), average number of comparisons = (1+2*2+4*3+4)/8 ~2.6



Exercise: what if the frequencies of query terms were non-uniform but known, how would you structure the dictionary search tree?

Dictionary search with blocking



- Binary search down to 4-term block;
  - Then linear search through terms in block.
- Blocks of 4 (binary tree), avg. = (1+2*2+2*3+2*4+5)/8 = 3 compares

Exercise

- Estimate the impact on search performance (and slowdown compared to k=1) with blocking, for block sizes of k = *4, 8* and *16.*

Approach 3: Front coding

- Front-coding:
  - Sorted words commonly have long common prefix – store differences only
  - (for last *k-1* in a block of *k*)

8***automata***8***automate***9***automatic***10***automation***

→8***automat**** ***a***1◊***e***2◊***ic***3◊***ion***

Encodes ***automat***

Extra length beyond ***automat.***

Begins to resemble general string compression.

RCV1 dictionary compression summary

Technique	Size in MB
Fixed width	11.2
Dictionary-as-String with pointers to every term	7.6
Also, blocking k = 4	7.1
Also, Blocking + front coding	5.9

POSTINGS COMPRESSION

Postings compression

- The postings file is much larger than the dictionary, factor of at least 10.
- Key desideratum: store each posting compactly.
- A posting for our purposes is a docID.
- For Reuters (800,000 documents), we would use 32 bits per docID when using 4-byte integers.
- Alternatively, we can use $\log_2 800{,}000 \approx 20$ bits per docID.
- Our goal: use far fewer than 20 bits per docID.

Postings: two conflicting forces

- A term like ***arachnocentric*** occurs in maybe one doc out of a million – we would like to store this posting using $\log_2 1M \sim 20$ bits.
- A term like ***the*** occurs in virtually every doc, so 20 bits/posting is too expensive.

Postings file entry

- We store the list of docs containing a term in increasing order of docID.
  - ***computer***: 33,47,154,159,202 …
- Consequence: it suffices to store gaps.
  - 33,14,107,5,43 …
- Hope: most gaps can be encoded/stored with far fewer than 20 bits.

Three postings entries

	encoding	postings list									
THE	docIDs	. . .		283042		283043		283044		283045	. . .
	gaps				1		1		1		. . .
COMPUTER	docIDs	. . .		283047		283154		283159		283202	. . .
	gaps				107		5		43		. . .
ARACHNOCENTRIC	docIDs	252000		500100							
	gaps	252000	248100								

Variable length encoding

- Aim:
  - For ***arachnocentric***, we will use ~20 bits/gap entry.
  - For ***the***, we will use ~1 bit/gap entry.
- If the average gap for a term is G, we want to use ~$\log_2 G$ bits/gap entry.
- Key challenge: encode every integer (gap) with about as few bits as needed for that integer.
- This requires a *variable length encoding*
- Variable length codes achieve this by using short codes for small numbers

Variable Byte (VB) codes

- For a gap value *G*, we want to use close to the fewest bytes needed to hold $\log_2 G$ bits
- Begin with one byte to store *G* and dedicate 1 bit in it to be a continuation bit *c*
- If $G \leq 127$, binary-encode it in the 7 available bits and set $c = 1$
- Else encode *G*'s lower-order 7 bits and then use additional bytes to encode the higher order bits using the same algorithm
- At the end set the continuation bit of the last byte to 1 ($c = 1$) – and for the other bytes $c = 0$.

Example

docIDs	824	829	215406
gaps		5	214577
VB code	00000110 10111000	10000101	00001101 00001100 10110001

Postings stored as the byte concatenation
000001101011100010000101000011010000110010110001

Key property: VB-encoded postings are uniquely prefix-decodable.

For a small gap (5), VB uses a whole byte.

Other variable unit codes

- Instead of bytes, we can also use a different "unit of alignment": 32 bits (words), 16 bits, 4 bits (nibbles).
- Variable byte alignment wastes space if you have many small gaps – nibbles do better in such cases.
- Variable byte codes:
  - Used by many commercial/research systems
  - Good low-tech blend of variable-length coding and sensitivity to computer memory alignment matches (vs. bit-level codes, which we look at next).

Variable bit-level codes: Unary code

- Represent *n* as *n* 1s with a final 0.
- Unary code for 3 is 1110.
- Unary code for 40 is

11111111111111111111111111111111111111110 .

- Unary code for 80 is:

11111111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111110

- This doesn't look promising, but….

Gamma codes

- We can compress better with bit-level codes
  - The Gamma code is the best known of these.
- Represent a gap *G* as a pair *length* and *offset*
- *offset* is *G* in binary, with the leading bit cut off
  - For example 13 → 1101 → 101
- *length* is the length of offset
  - For 13 (offset 101), this is 3.
- We encode *length* with *unary code*: 1110.
- Gamma code of 13 is the concatenation of *length* and *offset*: 1110101

Gamma code examples

number	length	offset	γ-code
0			none
1	0		0
2	10	0	10,0
3	10	1	10,1
4	110	00	110,00
9	1110	001	1110,001
13	1110	101	1110,101
24	11110	1000	11110,1000
511	111111110	11111111	111111110,11111111
1025	11111111110	0000000001	11111111110,0000000001

Gamma code properties

- G is encoded using $2\lfloor \log G \rfloor + 1$ bits
  - Length of offset is $\lfloor \log G \rfloor$ bits
  - Length of length is $\lfloor \log G \rfloor + 1$ bits
- All gamma codes have an odd number of bits
- Almost within a factor of 2 of best possible, $\log_2 G$

- Gamma code is uniquely prefix-decodable, like VB
- Gamma code can be used for any distribution
- Gamma code is parameter-free

RCV1 compression

Data structure	Size in MB
dictionary, fixed-width	11.2
dictionary, term pointers into string	7.6
with blocking, k = 4	7.1
with blocking & front coding	5.9
collection (text, xml markup etc)	3,600.0
collection (text)	960.0
Term-doc incidence matrix	40,000.0
postings, uncompressed (32-bit words)	400.0
postings, uncompressed (20 bits)	250.0
postings, variable byte encoded	116.0
postings, γ–encoded	101.0

Index compression summary

- We can now create an index for highly efficient Boolean retrieval that is very space efficient
- Only 4% of the total size of the collection
- Only 10-15% of the total size of the text in the collection
- However, we've ignored positional information
- Hence, space savings are less for indexes used in practice
  - But techniques substantially the same.