

# Unstructured Adiabatic Quantum Optimization

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

*Master of Science in Computer Science and Engineering by Research*

by

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## CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the work contained in this thesis, titled “Unstructured Adiabatic Quantum Optimization” by Alapan Chaudhuri, has been carried out under my supervision and is not submitted elsewhere for a degree.

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To a world that feels like it's splitting apart.  
May we keep repairing what we can.

“Computers are more forgiving than bare-bone nature or mathematics  
— both of which are infinitely more forgiving than academia.”

# Abstract

[TODO]

# Acknowledgement

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

## Chapter 2

# Physics and Computation

## Chapter 3

# Quantum Computation

## Chapter 4

# Adiabatic Quantum Computation

## Chapter 5

# Adiabatic Quantum Optimization

In the circuit model, unstructured optimization is a solved problem. Given a black-box cost function on  $N = 2^n$  bit-strings, Grover’s algorithm and its generalizations find a minimizer in  $O(\sqrt{N/d_0})$  queries, where  $d_0$  is the number of optima [1, 2]. The algorithm works without any prior knowledge of the cost function’s structure: amplitude amplification gathers the needed information adaptively, one oracle query at a time. No spectral parameter must be computed in advance, no schedule must be tuned to a gap profile, and no pre-computation threatens to match the cost of the search itself.

Adiabatic quantum computation is polynomially equivalent to the circuit model [3], so a matching speedup should be achievable. But the adiabatic approach operates under a different constraint: the evolution Hamiltonian  $H(s)$  interpolates continuously between an initial Hamiltonian  $H_0$  and the problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$ , and the runtime is controlled by the spectral gap of  $H(s)$  along the entire path. The gap structure of the interpolated Hamiltonian — where the avoided crossing occurs, how narrow it is, how fast the gap reopens — introduces obstacles that the circuit model avoids entirely. Matching the Grover speedup in this setting requires understanding and controlling these spectral features, which depend on the cost function in ways that are not a priori obvious.

The adiabatic version of Grover’s algorithm, due to Roland and Cerf [4], finds a single marked item among  $N = 2^n$  by slowly interpolating between a uniform superposition and a problem Hamiltonian that penalizes all unmarked items. The crossing between the two lowest energy levels occurs at  $s = 1/2$ , its position independent of the Hamiltonian’s spectrum. The minimum spectral gap scales as  $1/\sqrt{N}$ , and a schedule that slows near the crossing achieves the optimal  $O(\sqrt{N})$  runtime.

Consider a cost function encoded in an  $n$ -qubit Hamiltonian diagonal in the computational basis, with  $M$  distinct energy levels, arbitrary degeneracies, and a spectral gap that may vary with the number of qubits. The ground states encode solutions to a combinatorial optimization problem. Can the adiabatic approach still match the  $\Theta(\sqrt{N})$  lower bound for unstructured search [5]?

The bound applies directly to our setup: Farhi et al. proved that when  $H_0$  is a rank-one projector onto the uniform superposition, no schedule can find the ground state in time  $o(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ , regardless of the cost function. Their proof constructs  $N$  equivalent Hamiltonians related by Fourier shifts and applies a continuous-time analogue of the BBBV argument [6]. Partial answers exist: Žnidarič and Horvat [7] showed via analytical and heuristic arguments that the minimum gap scales as  $\sqrt{d_0}/2^n$  for 3-SAT instances and identified the crossing position, but did not rigorously bound the runtime. Hen [8] proved a quadratic speedup for a random Hamiltonian whose energy distribution ensures a crossing position independent of the spectrum, avoiding the central difficulty.

The answer in full generality is yes, but with complications that do not arise in the single-marked-item case. The spectrum of the interpolated Hamiltonian is far richer: instead of a two-level system plus a degenerate bulk, there are  $M$  interacting energy levels in a symmetric subspace, with avoided crossings between higher excited states that obscure the gap between the two lowest. The position of the ground-state avoided crossing depends nontrivially on the degeneracy structure of the problem Hamiltonian. And the minimum gap, while still scaling as  $\Theta(1/\sqrt{N})$  up to spectral factors, occurs at a position that must be known to exponential precision for the schedule to be correct.

The adiabatic Hamiltonian  $H(s)$  with a general diagonal problem Hamiltonian has a single avoided crossing at position  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1)$ , where  $A_1$  is a spectral parameter determined by the degeneracy structure. The minimum spectral gap at the crossing scales as  $\Theta(\sqrt{d_0/(NA_2)})$ , and the gap grows linearly on both sides. Chapter 6 proves the gap bounds outside the crossing window, Chapter 7 derives the optimal runtime, and Chapter 8 proves that computing  $s^*$  is NP-hard.

## 5.1 The Problem

Consider an  $n$ -qubit Hamiltonian  $H_z$  that is diagonal in the computational basis:

$$H_z = \sum_{z \in \{0,1\}^n} E_z |z\rangle \langle z|, \quad (5.1.1)$$

where  $E_z$  is the energy assigned to bit-string  $z$ . Since  $H_z$  acts diagonally, it encodes a classical cost function: the energy  $E_z$  is the cost of configuration  $z$ , and the ground states are the optimal solutions. Without loss of generality, we rescale and shift so that all eigenvalues lie in  $[0, 1]$ .

Suppose  $H_z$  has  $M$  distinct energy levels with eigenvalues

$$0 \leq E_0 < E_1 < \dots < E_{M-1} \leq 1. \quad (5.1.2)$$

For each level  $k$ , the set of bit-strings at that energy is

$$\Omega_k = \{z \in \{0,1\}^n : H_z |z\rangle = E_k |z\rangle\}, \quad (5.1.3)$$

with degeneracy  $d_k = |\Omega_k|$ . The degeneracies partition the full Hilbert space:  $\sum_{k=0}^{M-1} d_k = 2^n = N$ . The spectral gap of the problem Hamiltonian is  $\Delta = E_1 - E_0$ , the energy difference between the ground state and the first excited level.

A concrete and important instance is the 2-local Ising Hamiltonian

$$H_\sigma = \sum_{\langle i,j \rangle} J_{ij} \sigma_z^i \sigma_z^j + \sum_{j=1}^n h_j \sigma_z^j, \quad (5.1.4)$$

where  $J_{ij}, h_j \in \{-m, -m+1, \dots, m\}$  for some constant positive integer  $m$ . Since each eigenvalue is an integer linear combination of at most  $\binom{n}{2} + n$  couplings bounded by  $m$ , the eigenvalues lie in  $\{-L, -L+1, \dots, L\}$  for  $L = O(mn^2)$ , giving at most  $2L+1 \in \text{poly}(n)$  distinct energy levels. After normalization to unit operator norm, consecutive eigenvalues differ by at least  $1/(2L) \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$ , so the spectral gap satisfies  $\Delta \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$ . Solutions to NP-hard problems such as MaxCut and QUBO encode directly in the ground states of  $H_\sigma$  with minimal overhead [9, 10].

For the running example, take unstructured search:  $M = 2$  energy levels, a single ground state ( $d_0 = 1$ ) with energy  $E_0 = 0$ , and  $N - 1$  excited states ( $d_1 = N - 1$ ) at energy  $E_1 = 1$ . The ground state is the “marked item.” Classical search requires  $\Theta(N)$  queries; Grover’s circuit algorithm requires  $\Theta(\sqrt{N})$  [1, 6].

To solve this optimization problem adiabatically, we interpolate between an initial Hamiltonian whose ground state is easy to prepare and the problem Hamiltonian whose ground state encodes the solution. The initial Hamiltonian is the rank-one projector

$$H_0 = -|\psi_0\rangle \langle \psi_0|, \quad |\psi_0\rangle = |+\rangle^{\otimes n} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \sum_{z \in \{0,1\}^n} |z\rangle. \quad (5.1.5)$$

Every computational basis state receives equal amplitude, so  $|\psi_0\rangle$  introduces no bias toward any particular solution.

The adiabatic Hamiltonian is the linear interpolation

$$H(s) = -(1-s)|\psi_0\rangle \langle \psi_0| + sH_z, \quad s \in [0, 1]. \quad (5.1.6)$$

At  $s = 0$ , the ground state is  $|\psi_0\rangle$  with energy  $-1$ , and all other states have energy 0. At  $s = 1$ , the Hamiltonian is  $H_z$  itself, and its ground states encode the solutions. The adiabatic theorem guarantees that if the schedule  $s(t)$  traverses  $[0, 1]$  slowly enough, the evolved state remains close to the instantaneous ground state throughout, arriving at the end in a state with high overlap with the ground space of  $H_z$ .

The choice of a rank-one projector for  $H_0$ , rather than a more general Hamiltonian, has a structural consequence. At  $s = 0$ , the spectrum of  $H(s)$  has a single non-degenerate eigenvalue at  $-1$  (the ground state) and an  $(N - 1)$ -fold degenerate eigenvalue at 0. As  $s$  increases, the degeneracy splits according to the spectrum of  $H_z$ . Because  $H_0 = -|\psi_0\rangle \langle \psi_0|$  has rank one, the coupling between any two eigenstates of  $sH_z$  factors through  $|\psi_0\rangle$ : the matrix element  $\langle k | H_0 | j \rangle = -\sqrt{d_k d_j}/N$  is nonzero for all pairs, but the perturbation has only one degree of freedom, so the eigenvalues repel through a single channel. This produces a single avoided crossing between the two lowest energy levels, in contrast to generic AQC Hamiltonians that may exhibit multiple crossings requiring different analytical techniques [11, 12]. The single-crossing structure is what makes a complete spectral analysis tractable.

The standard alternative to the rank-one projector is the transverse-field driver  $H_0 = -\sum_{j=1}^n \sigma_x^j$ , which is the default in quantum annealing hardware and in much of the AQC literature [11]. It couples every pair of computational basis states that differ in a single qubit, producing a dense web of avoided crossings throughout the interpolation. For random instances of NP-complete problems, Altshuler, Krovi, and Roland [13] showed that the resulting spectrum exhibits Anderson localization: exponentially many avoided crossings with exponentially small gaps, a regime where no known analytical technique yields tight gap bounds. The rank-one projector avoids this entirely. Because  $|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$  has a single non-zero eigenvalue, all coupling between eigenstates of  $sH_z$  flows through one channel, producing one crossing that can be analyzed exactly. The tractability of Chapters 5–7 is a direct consequence of this choice. Whether comparable results can be obtained for the transverse-field driver remains open; the Discussion of the published paper [14] identifies this as a central challenge.

For the running example,  $H(s) = -(1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + s(I - |w\rangle\langle w|)$ , where  $|w\rangle$  is the marked item. Up to a global energy shift of  $s$ , this is the Roland-Cerf Hamiltonian [4]. The spectrum has  $N - 2$  states at energy  $s$  (degenerate, orthogonal to both  $|\psi_0\rangle$  and  $|w\rangle$ ) and two states whose energies depend on  $s$  and undergo an avoided crossing near  $s = 1/2$ .

## 5.2 Spectral Parameters

In the Roland-Cerf setting, the crossing position ( $s^* = 1/2$ ), its width, and the minimum gap are all determined by a single quantity:  $N$ . For a general problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$  with  $M$  energy levels and arbitrary degeneracies, no single number suffices. The crossing position depends on the full eigenvalue structure of  $H_z$  — not just  $E_0$  and  $E_1$ , but all  $M$  levels and their degeneracies. We need quantities that distill this  $M$ -dimensional information into numbers that directly control the algorithm’s behavior: where the crossing occurs, how sharp the gap minimum is, and how fast the gap reopens. The relevant information is captured by a family of spectral parameters that aggregate the degeneracy structure weighted by inverse energy gaps.

**Definition 5.2.1** (Spectral parameters). *For the problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$  with eigenvalues  $E_0 < E_1 < \dots < E_{M-1}$  and degeneracies  $d_k$ , define*

$$A_p = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{(E_k - E_0)^p}, \quad p \in \mathbb{N}. \quad (5.2.1)$$

Each excited level contributes its degeneracy  $d_k$  weighted by the inverse  $p$ -th power of its distance to the ground energy. Higher values of  $p$  emphasize levels closer to the ground state:  $A_1$  weights each level by  $1/(E_k - E_0)$ , giving most influence to levels just above the ground energy, while  $A_2$  weights by  $1/(E_k - E_0)^2$ , amplifying this emphasis so that a level at energy  $E_0 + \varepsilon$  contributes  $O(1/\varepsilon^2)$  to  $A_2$  but only  $O(1/\varepsilon)$  to  $A_1$ . As we will see,  $A_1$  controls where the crossing occurs (it sets  $s^*$ ), while  $A_2$  controls how sharp the crossing is (it appears in  $g_{\min}$  and  $\delta_s$ ). The normalization by  $N = 2^n$  makes  $A_p$  an average over the full Hilbert space.

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ,  $d_1 = N - 1$ ,  $E_0 = 0$ ,  $E_1 = 1$ ):

$$A_p = \frac{N-1}{N} \approx 1 \quad \text{for all } p, \quad (5.2.2)$$

since  $E_1 - E_0 = 1$ . The spectral parameters are trivial in this case, which is precisely why the Roland-Cerf analysis is simple.

For a general Ising Hamiltonian with  $\Delta \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$  and  $M \in \text{poly}(n)$ , the bound  $A_1 \leq (1 - d_0/N)/\Delta$  gives  $A_1 = O(\text{poly}(n))$ , while  $A_2 \geq 1 - d_0/N$  ensures  $A_2 = \Theta(1)$  at minimum.

The parameter  $A_1$  determines the position of the avoided crossing:  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1)$ . That  $s^*$  depends only on  $A_1$  — a single spectral summary — is the structural reason the schedule has a closed form. The parameter  $A_2$  enters the minimum spectral gap:  $g_{\min} = \Theta(\sqrt{d_0/(NA_2)})$ . The gap scales as  $\sqrt{d_0/N}$ : more ground states strengthen the coupling and widen the crossing. Both parameters appear in the runtime:  $T = O((\sqrt{A_2}/(A_1(A_1 + 1)\Delta^2))\sqrt{N/d_0})$ .

Since every eigenvalue gap satisfies  $E_k - E_0 \leq 1$  and the total excited degeneracy is  $\sum_{k \geq 1} d_k = N - d_0$ , we have

$$A_2 \geq \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} d_k = 1 - \frac{d_0}{N}. \quad (5.2.3)$$

For  $d_0 \ll N$  (few solutions),  $A_2 \geq 1 - 1/N$  is close to 1. Also,  $A_1 \leq (1 - d_0/N)/\Delta$ , since  $(E_k - E_0)^{-1} \leq \Delta^{-1}$  for all  $k \geq 1$ . Since  $E_k - E_0 \geq \Delta$  for all  $k \geq 1$ , termwise comparison gives  $A_1 \geq A_2\Delta$ . Since  $E_k - E_0 \leq 1$ , we also have  $A_1 \leq A_2$ . Together:  $A_2\Delta \leq A_1 \leq A_2$ .

The two-level approximation near the crossing is accurate only when the crossing window  $\delta_s = O(\sqrt{d_0 A_2/N})$  is narrow compared to  $[0, 1]$ . Since  $\delta_s/s^* = O((1/\Delta)\sqrt{d_0/(A_2 N)})$ , this requires the spectral parameters to be polynomially bounded relative to  $N$  — a condition we now make explicit.

**Definition 5.2.2** (Spectral condition). *The problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$  satisfies the spectral condition if there exists a constant  $c \ll 1$  such that*

$$\frac{1}{\Delta} \sqrt{\frac{d_0}{A_2 N}} < c. \quad (5.2.4)$$

The quantity on the left is the ratio of the crossing width parameter to the spectral gap, up to constant factors. When it is small, the two-level approximation near the crossing is accurate (the higher levels do not interfere), and the crossing window occupies a negligible fraction of  $[0, 1]$ . The appendix of the published paper shows that  $c \approx 0.02$  suffices [14]. When the condition fails, the crossing window is no longer narrow, higher energy levels interfere with the two-level dynamics, and the gap bounds of this chapter no longer apply. The failure is not merely a technical limitation of the proof but reflects a genuine change in spectral structure. For random instances of NP-complete problems with the transverse-field driver  $H_0 = -\sum_j \sigma_x^j$ , Altshuler, Krovi, and Roland [13] showed that the spectrum exhibits exponentially many avoided crossings with exponentially small gaps — a regime where the ground state energy level threads through a dense forest of near-degeneracies rather than passing through a single isolated crossing. In that regime, the two-level picture of this chapter breaks down entirely: the eigenvalue equation still holds, but the truncation to a quadratic in  $\delta$  (Eq. (5.4.3)) requires  $|\delta| \ll s\Delta$ , which fails when many excited levels crowd near the ground energy. The spectral condition is therefore a boundary between two fundamentally different regimes: the single-crossing regime, where the framework of Chapters 5–7 applies and the Grover speedup is achievable, and the multi-crossing regime, where the spectral landscape is currently intractable [12].

For any  $H_z$  with  $\Delta > (1/c)\sqrt{d_0/N}$ , the condition holds, using  $A_2 \geq 1 - d_0/N$ . For the Ising Hamiltonian with  $\Delta \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$  and  $d_0$  not scaling with  $N$ , the left side is exponentially small in  $n$ , so the condition is easily satisfied. For the running example with  $\Delta = 1$  and  $d_0 = 1$ , the left side is  $1/\sqrt{N}$ , well below any constant  $c$  for  $N \geq 2$ .

### 5.3 Symmetry Reduction

The Hilbert space of  $H(s)$  has dimension  $N = 2^n$ , exponentially large in the number of qubits. Direct spectral analysis is intractable. But the problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$  has only  $M$  distinct energy levels, and the initial state  $|\psi_0\rangle$  treats all bit-strings at the same energy identically. This permutation symmetry within each degenerate subspace reduces the eigenvalue problem from  $N$  dimensions to  $M$ .

For each energy level  $k$ , define the symmetric state

$$|k\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{d_k}} \sum_{z \in \Omega_k} |z\rangle, \quad 0 \leq k \leq M-1. \quad (5.3.1)$$

These  $M$  states are orthonormal:  $\langle j|k\rangle = \delta_{jk}$ . They span the  $M$ -dimensional symmetric subspace

$$\mathcal{H}_S = \text{span}\{|k\rangle : 0 \leq k \leq M-1\}. \quad (5.3.2)$$

In this basis, the problem Hamiltonian has  $M$  non-degenerate eigenvalues:

$$H_z = \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} E_k |k\rangle \langle k| \quad \text{on } \mathcal{H}_S, \quad (5.3.3)$$

and the initial state decomposes as

$$|\psi_0\rangle = \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \sqrt{\frac{d_k}{N}} |k\rangle. \quad (5.3.4)$$

Since  $|\psi_0\rangle \in \mathcal{H}_S$  and both  $H_z$  and  $|\psi_0\rangle \langle \psi_0|$  map  $\mathcal{H}_S$  to itself, the adiabatic Hamiltonian  $H(s)$  leaves  $\mathcal{H}_S$  invariant. The time evolution starting from  $|\psi_0\rangle$  remains in  $\mathcal{H}_S$  for all  $s$ .

The complement  $\mathcal{H}_S^\perp$  has dimension  $N-M$  and is spanned by states orthogonal to  $|\psi_0\rangle$  within each degenerate subspace. For each level  $k$ , order the bit-strings in  $\Omega_k$  as  $z_k^{(1)}, \dots, z_k^{(d_k)}$  and define the Fourier basis

$$|k^{(\ell)}\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{d_k}} \sum_{\ell'=1}^{d_k} \exp\left[\frac{i2\pi\ell\ell'}{d_k}\right] |z_k^{(\ell')}\rangle, \quad 1 \leq \ell \leq d_k-1. \quad (5.3.5)$$

Note that  $|k^{(0)}\rangle = |k\rangle$  is the symmetric state already in  $\mathcal{H}_S$ . The remaining  $d_k - 1$  states for each level  $k$  form a basis for  $\mathcal{H}_S^\perp$ :

$$\mathcal{H}_S^\perp = \text{span} \left\{ |k^{(\ell)}\rangle : 0 \leq k \leq M-1, 1 \leq \ell \leq d_k-1 \right\}. \quad (5.3.6)$$

Each  $|k^{(\ell)}\rangle$  is an eigenstate of  $H(s)$  with eigenvalue  $sE_k$ :

$$H(s) |k^{(\ell)}\rangle = -(1-s) |\psi_0\rangle \underbrace{\langle \psi_0 | k^{(\ell)} \rangle}_{=0} + sE_k |k^{(\ell)}\rangle = sE_k |k^{(\ell)}\rangle. \quad (5.3.7)$$

The inner product vanishes because  $|k^{(\ell)}\rangle$  is orthogonal to  $|k\rangle = |k^{(0)}\rangle$  by construction, and  $|\psi_0\rangle$  is a linear combination of the  $|k\rangle$  states. These  $N - M$  eigenstates are spectators: their eigenvalues  $sE_k$  are trivially known and they do not participate in the adiabatic evolution.

Henceforth,  $H(s)$  denotes its restriction to the symmetric subspace  $\mathcal{H}_S$ :

$$H(s) = -(1-s) |\psi_0\rangle \langle \psi_0| + s \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} E_k |k\rangle \langle k|. \quad (5.3.8)$$

This is a rank-one perturbation of the diagonal matrix  $sH_z$ . Its eigenvalues can be characterized exactly.

**Lemma 5.3.1** (Eigenvalue equation). *Let  $H(s)$  be the adiabatic Hamiltonian restricted to  $\mathcal{H}_S$  as in Eq. (5.3.8). Then  $\lambda(s)$  is an eigenvalue of  $H(s)$  if and only if*

$$\frac{1}{1-s} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{sE_k - \lambda(s)}. \quad (5.3.9)$$

*Proof.* Let  $|\psi\rangle = \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \alpha_k |k\rangle$  be an eigenstate of  $H(s)$  with eigenvalue  $\lambda$ , and set  $\gamma = \langle \psi_0 | \psi \rangle$ . Acting with  $H(s)$  on  $|\psi\rangle$ :

$$H(s) |\psi\rangle = s \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} E_k \alpha_k |k\rangle - (1-s) \gamma |\psi_0\rangle = \lambda \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \alpha_k |k\rangle. \quad (5.3.10)$$

Comparing coefficients of  $|k\rangle$  and using  $\langle \psi_0 | k \rangle = \sqrt{d_k/N}$  gives

$$\alpha_k = \frac{(1-s) \gamma \sqrt{d_k/N}}{sE_k - \lambda}. \quad (5.3.11)$$

Since  $\gamma = \langle \psi_0 | \psi \rangle = (1/\sqrt{N}) \sum_k \alpha_k \sqrt{d_k}$ , substituting Eq. (5.3.11) yields

$$1 = \frac{1-s}{N} \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{sE_k - \lambda}, \quad (5.3.12)$$

which is equivalent to Eq. (5.3.9). Each step is reversible: given a solution  $\lambda$  of Eq. (5.3.9), the coefficients in Eq. (5.3.11) define an eigenstate (after normalization), provided  $\gamma \neq 0$ . The case  $\gamma = 0$  corresponds to  $\lambda = sE_k$  for some  $k$ , which are the eigenvalues in  $\mathcal{H}_S^\perp$  already accounted for.  $\square$

The right-hand side of Eq. (5.3.9), viewed as a function of  $\lambda$ , is a sum of  $M$  terms, each a decreasing function with a vertical asymptote at  $\lambda = sE_k$ . Between consecutive poles  $sE_{k-1}$  and  $sE_k$ , the function decreases monotonically from  $+\infty$  to  $-\infty$ , producing exactly one root per interval. Below the lowest pole  $sE_0$ , there is one additional root. The total count is  $M$  eigenvalues in  $\mathcal{H}_S$ , consistent with the dimension.

The two lowest eigenvalues are  $\lambda_0(s) < sE_0$  (ground state) and  $\lambda_1(s) \in (sE_0, sE_1)$  (first excited state). The spectral gap is  $g(s) = \lambda_1(s) - \lambda_0(s) > 0$ . However, the eigenvalue equation alone gives only the trivial bound  $0 < g(s) < s\Delta$ , since  $\lambda_0(s)$  could be arbitrarily close to  $sE_0$  from below while  $\lambda_1(s)$  could be close to  $sE_0$  from above. Extracting tight bounds requires analyzing the eigenvalue equation in the vicinity of the crossing.

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ), Eq. (5.3.9) becomes

$$\frac{1}{1-s} = \frac{1}{N} \cdot \frac{1}{-\lambda} + \frac{N-1}{N} \cdot \frac{1}{s-\lambda}, \quad (5.3.13)$$

where we set  $E_0 = 0$  and  $E_1 = 1$ . Clearing denominators produces the quadratic  $N\lambda^2 - N(2s-1)\lambda - s(1-s) = 0$ , whose two roots give the ground and first excited energies:

$$\lambda_{\pm}(s) = \frac{2s-1}{2} \pm \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{(2s-1)^2 + \frac{4s(1-s)}{N}}. \quad (5.3.14)$$

At  $s = 0$ , the ground energy is  $\lambda_- = -1$  and the first excited energy is  $\lambda_+ = 0$ , consistent with the spectrum of  $H(0) = -|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$ . The gap  $g(s) = \lambda_+(s) - \lambda_-(s)$  simplifies to

$$g(s) = \sqrt{(2s-1)^2 + \frac{4s(1-s)}{N}}, \quad (5.3.15)$$

which is minimized at  $s = 1/2$  exactly, giving  $g_{\min} = 1/\sqrt{N}$ . This is the Roland-Cerf gap. The general theory of the next section reproduces this scaling as a special case.

## 5.4 The Avoided Crossing

The eigenvalue equation (Lemma 5.3.1) characterizes the spectrum of  $H(s)$  implicitly. We now extract explicit formulas for the crossing position, its width, and the minimum gap by analyzing the equation near the ground state energy. Near the crossing, the ground and first excited states behave like a two-level system, with the higher levels acting as a perturbation controlled by the spectral condition.

The two lowest eigenvalues have the form  $\lambda(s) = sE_0 + \delta(s)$ , where  $\delta(s)$  is a correction to the trivial energy  $sE_0$ . Writing the eigenvalue as a perturbation of the nearest pole isolates the ground-state contribution and converts the implicit equation into an explicit power series — a standard technique for rank-one updates of diagonal eigenvalue problems [15]. Substituting into Eq. (5.3.9):

$$-\frac{d_0}{N\delta} + \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{s(E_k - E_0) - \delta} = \frac{1}{1-s}. \quad (5.4.1)$$

The first term has a pole at  $\delta = 0$ ; the sum has poles at  $\delta = s(E_k - E_0)$  for  $k \geq 1$ . When  $|\delta| \ll s\Delta$  (guaranteed by the spectral condition), the sum can be expanded in powers of  $\delta/(s(E_k - E_0))$ :

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{s(E_k - E_0) - \delta} = \frac{1}{s} \left( A_1 + \frac{\delta}{s} A_2 + \frac{\delta^2}{s^2} A_3 + \cdots \right). \quad (5.4.2)$$

Truncating at the  $A_2$  term and rearranging Eq. (5.4.1) gives a quadratic in  $\delta$  whose two roots are the corrections  $\delta_0^+(s)$  and  $\delta_0^-(s)$  for the first excited and ground states, respectively:

$$\delta_0^\pm(s) = \frac{s(A_1 + 1)}{2A_2(1-s)} \left[ (s - s^*) \pm \sqrt{(s^* - s)^2 + \frac{4A_2d_0}{N(A_1 + 1)^2}(1-s)^2} \right], \quad (5.4.3)$$

Here  $\delta_0^+(s) > 0$  corresponds to the first excited state and  $\delta_0^-(s) < 0$  to the ground state: the superscript indicates the sign of the correction relative to  $sE_0$ . The crossing position is

$$s^* = \frac{A_1}{A_1 + 1}. \quad (5.4.4)$$

The quantity  $s^*$  is the position of the avoided crossing. It is entirely determined by  $A_1$ , and hence by the degeneracy-weighted inverse gaps of the problem Hamiltonian. For the Ising Hamiltonian with  $\Delta \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$ , we have  $A_1 \geq \Theta(1)$ , so  $s^*$  is bounded away from both 0 and 1. In the limit  $A_1 \rightarrow \infty$  (many levels near the ground state),  $s^* \rightarrow 1$ ; when  $A_1$  is small,  $s^*$  is closer to 0.

The crossing position marks a balance in the eigenvalue equation:  $A_1/s^* = 1/(1-s^*)$ , where the left side is the aggregate spectral pull of the excited levels toward  $sE_0$  and the right side is the projector strength. At  $s = s^*$ , the linear coefficient in the quadratic for  $\delta$  (Eq. (5.4.3)) vanishes, and the two roots  $\delta_0^\pm$  are symmetric about zero. The gap is determined entirely by the constant term  $d_0/N$ : the ground-state degeneracy is what opens the minimum gap.

The truncation is an approximation. The actual roots  $\delta_\pm(s)$  of the full equation differ from  $\delta_0^\pm(s)$  by a relative error controlled by the spectral condition. The following result, whose proof uses the intermediate value theorem on the full equation after bounding the remainder using  $A_3$  and the spectral condition, makes this precise. The technique was developed for optimal spatial search via continuous-time quantum walks [16], where the same rank-one perturbation structure arises with a graph Laplacian replacing the diagonal Hamiltonian; the adaptation to the AQO setting appears in the published paper [14].

**Lemma 5.4.1** (Validity of approximation). *Let  $H_z$  satisfy the spectral condition (Definition 5.2.2) with constant  $c \approx 0.02$ , and define*

$$\delta_s = \frac{2}{(A_1 + 1)^2} \sqrt{\frac{d_0 A_2}{N}}. \quad (5.4.5)$$

*Then for any  $s \in \mathcal{I}_{s^*} = [s^* - \delta_s, s^* + \delta_s]$ , there exists a constant  $\eta \ll 1$  such that the two lowest eigenvalues of  $H(s)$  satisfy*

$$\delta_+(s) \in ((1 - \eta) \delta_0^+(s), (1 + \eta) \delta_0^+(s)), \quad (5.4.6)$$

$$\delta_-(s) \in ((1 + \eta) \delta_0^-(s), (1 - \eta) \delta_0^-(s)), \quad (5.4.7)$$

where  $\delta_0^\pm(s)$  are given by Eq. (5.4.3).

The proof evaluates the full equation (5.4.1) at  $\delta_0^\pm(1 \pm \eta)$  and shows, using the spectral condition to bound the truncated Taylor remainder, that the full equation changes sign between these points. The intermediate value theorem then guarantees a root in the interval. The spectral condition enters through the bound  $|\delta_0^\pm(s)|/(s\Delta) \leq \kappa c < 1$ , where  $\kappa$  is a constant depending on  $c$ , ensuring the geometric series in the Taylor expansion converges. The constant  $c \approx 0.02$  is sufficient for  $\eta \leq 0.1$ . The complete calculation appears in the appendix of the published paper [14].

The spectral gap  $g(s) = \delta_+(s) - \delta_-(s)$  is therefore approximated to within a factor of  $1 \pm 2\eta$  by  $\delta_0^+(s) - \delta_0^-(s)$ , which evaluates to

$$g(s) = (1 \pm 2\eta) \cdot \frac{s(A_1 + 1)}{A_2(1 - s)} \sqrt{(s^* - s)^2 + \frac{4A_2 d_0}{N(A_1 + 1)^2} (1 - s)^2}. \quad (5.4.8)$$

At  $s = s^*$ , the first term under the square root vanishes, leaving only the second:

$$g_{\min} = g(s^*) \geq (1 - 2\eta) \cdot \frac{2A_1}{A_1 + 1} \sqrt{\frac{d_0}{NA_2}}. \quad (5.4.9)$$

This is the minimum spectral gap of  $H(s)$ .

The formulas decompose as follows. The factor  $2A_1/(A_1 + 1)$  captures the position of the crossing: a crossing near the boundary ( $s^* \rightarrow 0$  or  $s^* \rightarrow 1$ ) reduces the gap. The factor  $\sqrt{d_0/N}$  is the Grover-like contribution: more solutions (larger  $d_0$ ) increase the gap and reduce the runtime. The factor  $1/\sqrt{A_2}$  encodes the spectral structure beyond the simplest two-level case.

The crossing position  $s^*$ , the window width  $\delta_s$ , and the leading-order minimum gap are connected by an exact algebraic identity. Writing  $\hat{g} = \frac{2A_1}{A_1 + 1} \sqrt{\frac{d_0}{NA_2}}$  for the leading-order expression, direct substitution gives

$$\frac{s^*(A_1 + 1)^2}{A_2} \cdot \delta_s = \hat{g}, \quad (5.4.10)$$

and by Eq. (5.4.9),  $g_{\min} \geq (1 - 2\eta)\hat{g}$ . This relation will be used in Chapter 7 to verify the runtime calculation.

The interval  $[0, 1]$  splits into three regions based on the crossing:

$$\mathcal{I}_{s \leftarrow} = [0, s^* - \delta_s], \quad \mathcal{I}_{s^*} = [s^* - \delta_s, s^* + \delta_s], \quad \mathcal{I}_{s \rightarrow} = (s^* + \delta_s, 1]. \quad (5.4.11)$$

Within the window  $\mathcal{I}_{s^*}$ , the gap is bounded both from below and above in terms of  $g_{\min}$ .

**Lemma 5.4.2** (Gap within the crossing window). *Let  $H_z$  satisfy the spectral condition with constant  $c$ , and define*

$$\kappa' = \frac{(1 + 2\eta)(1 + 2c)}{(1 - 2\eta)(1 - 2c)} \sqrt{1 + (1 - 2c)^2}. \quad (5.4.12)$$

*Then for any  $s \in \mathcal{I}_{s^*}$ ,*

$$g_{\min} \leq g(s) \leq \kappa' \cdot g_{\min}. \quad (5.4.13)$$

*Proof.* The lower bound is immediate from the definition of  $g_{\min}$  as the minimum over  $\mathcal{I}_{s^*}$ . For the upper bound, start from Eq. (5.4.8) with  $|s - s^*| \leq \delta_s$ :

$$g(s) \leq \frac{s(A_1 + 1)}{A_2(1 - s)} \sqrt{\delta_s^2 + \frac{4A_2 d_0}{N(A_1 + 1)^2} (1 - s)^2}. \quad (5.4.14)$$

Factoring out  $(A_1 + 1)\delta_s(1 - s)$  under the square root and using  $s/s^* \leq 1 + \delta_s/s^*$ :

$$g(s) \leq \frac{s^*(A_1 + 1)^2}{A_2} \delta_s \cdot \frac{s}{s^*} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{1}{(1 - s)^2(A_1 + 1)^2} + 1}. \quad (5.4.15)$$

The first factor equals  $\hat{g}$  by Eq. (5.4.10). The spectral condition gives  $\delta_s/(1 - s^*) \leq 2c$  and  $\delta_s/s^* \leq 2c$ . To see the first, compute

$$\frac{\delta_s}{1 - s^*} = \frac{2}{1 + A_1} \sqrt{\frac{d_0 A_2}{N}} = \frac{2A_2 \Delta}{1 + A_1} \cdot \frac{1}{\Delta} \sqrt{\frac{d_0}{A_2 N}} \leq 2s^* c \leq 2c, \quad (5.4.16)$$

where we used  $A_2 \Delta/(1 + A_1) \leq A_1/(1 + A_1) = s^*$ . The bound  $\delta_s/s^* \leq 2c$  follows similarly. Substituting into the upper bound:

$$g(s) \leq (1 + 2\eta)\hat{g} \cdot (1 + 2c)\sqrt{1 + (1 - 2c)^2} \leq \kappa' \cdot g_{\min}, \quad (5.4.17)$$

where the factor  $(1 + 2\eta)$  comes from the upper approximation in Eq. (5.4.8), and the last step uses  $\hat{g} \leq g_{\min}/(1 - 2\eta)$ .  $\square$

The spectral gap is therefore of order  $g_{\min}$  throughout  $\mathcal{I}_{s^*}$  and strictly larger outside this window, as the next section establishes. The avoided crossing is localized.

For the running example, the formulas specialize cleanly. With  $A_1 = A_2 = (N - 1)/N$ :

$$s^* = \frac{(N - 1)/N}{(N - 1)/N + 1} = \frac{N - 1}{2N - 1} \approx \frac{1}{2}, \quad (5.4.18)$$

$$g_{\min} = \frac{2(N - 1)/(2N - 1)}{\sqrt{N} \cdot (N - 1)/N} = \frac{2(N - 1)}{(2N - 1)\sqrt{N - 1}} \approx \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}}, \quad (5.4.19)$$

$$\delta_s = \frac{2N^2}{(2N - 1)^2} \sqrt{\frac{N - 1}{N^2}} \approx \frac{1}{2\sqrt{N}}. \quad (5.4.20)$$

The crossing is at  $s^* \approx 1/2$ , the minimum gap scales as  $1/\sqrt{N}$ , and the window width scales as  $1/\sqrt{N}$ . These agree asymptotically with the exact quadratic solution in Eq. (5.3.15), confirming the general theory reproduces the known scaling. The small discrepancy between  $s^* = (N - 1)/(2N - 1)$  and the exact minimum at  $s = 1/2$  is a higher-order effect of the two-level truncation, vanishing as  $O(1/N)$ .

## 5.5 Gap Structure

The previous section characterized the spectral gap within the crossing window  $\mathcal{I}_{s^*}$ : it is  $\Theta(g_{\min})$  throughout. For the adiabatic algorithm, we also need the gap outside this window. The local adaptive schedule that achieves optimal runtime requires knowing how the gap grows as  $s$  moves away from  $s^*$ , so that the evolution speeds up in regions of larger gap.

The following two results, proved in Chapter 6, bound the gap in the left and right regions.

**Lemma 5.5.1** (Gap to the left of the crossing). *For any  $s \in \mathcal{I}_{s^*}^{\leftarrow} = [0, s^* - \delta_s)$ , the spectral gap of  $H(s)$  satisfies*

$$g(s) \geq \frac{A_1(A_1 + 1)}{A_2} (s^* - s). \quad (5.5.1)$$

The proof, detailed in Chapter 6, uses the variational principle: an explicit ansatz  $|\phi\rangle$  provides an upper bound on the ground energy  $\lambda_0(s) \leq \langle \phi | H(s) | \phi \rangle$ , while the eigenvalue equation gives the lower bound  $\lambda_1(s) \geq sE_0$  on the first excited energy. The ansatz is

$$|\phi\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{A_2 N}} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{\sqrt{d_k}}{E_k - E_0} |k\rangle, \quad (5.5.2)$$

which concentrates amplitude on levels close to the ground energy, yielding a tight upper bound on  $\lambda_0(s)$ . A second route uses concavity: since  $\lambda_0(s) = \min_{|\psi\rangle} \langle \psi | H(s) | \psi \rangle$  is the pointwise minimum of functions linear in  $s$ , it is concave. The tangent to a concave function lies above it, so the tangent to  $\lambda_0$  at  $s^*$  gives a linear upper bound that, combined with  $\lambda_1(s) \geq sE_0$ , reproduces Eq. (5.5.1). Chapter 6 develops both approaches.

**Lemma 5.5.2** (Gap to the right of the crossing). *Let  $k = 1/4$ ,  $a = 4k^2\Delta/3$ , and*

$$s_0 = s^* - \frac{k g_{\min}(1 - s^*)}{a - k g_{\min}}. \quad (5.5.3)$$

*Then for all  $s \geq s^*$ , the spectral gap of  $H(s)$  satisfies*

$$g(s) \geq \frac{\Delta}{30} \cdot \frac{s - s_0}{1 - s_0}. \quad (5.5.4)$$

This bound is linear in  $s - s_0$ , with a slope proportional to  $\Delta$ . The proof, also in Chapter 6, uses the resolvent method: a line  $\gamma(s) = sE_0 + \beta(s)$  is placed between the two lowest eigenvalues, and the Sherman-Morrison formula [17] bounds the resolvent norm  $\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\|$ , giving  $g(s) \geq 2/\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\|$ . The constants  $k = 1/4$  and  $a = 4k^2\Delta/3$  are tuned to make the resulting function  $f(s)$  monotonically decreasing on  $[s^*, 1]$ , yielding the clean bound  $\Delta/30$ .

Both bounds exceed  $g_{\min}$  at the window boundary. At  $s = s^* - \delta_s$  (left boundary), the left bound gives

$$g(s^* - \delta_s) \geq \frac{A_1(A_1 + 1)}{A_2} \cdot \delta_s = \frac{2A_1}{A_1 + 1} \sqrt{\frac{d_0}{NA_2}} = \hat{g}, \quad (5.5.5)$$

which satisfies  $\hat{g} = \Theta(g_{\min})$  by Eq. (5.4.9). At  $s = s^*$  (right boundary start),  $\beta(s^*) \geq k g_{\min}$ , so  $g(s^*) \geq 2k g_{\min}/(1 + f(s^*)) = O(g_{\min})$  since  $f(s^*) = \Theta(1)$ . The gap profile is therefore continuous across region boundaries: it dips to  $g_{\min}$  at  $s^*$  and rises linearly on both sides.

The complete gap profile feeds directly into the runtime calculation. The optimal local adaptive schedule [18, 4] has  $ds/dt \propto g(s)^2$ : the evolution slows quadratically as the gap decreases. The total runtime is

$$T \propto \int_0^1 \frac{ds}{g(s)^2}, \quad (5.5.6)$$

split across the three regions. In the left and right regions, the linear growth  $g(s) \propto |s - s^*|$  makes  $1/g(s)^2 \propto 1/(s - s^*)^2$ , which integrates to a logarithmic contribution. In the window,  $g(s) = \Theta(g_{\min})$  is approximately constant, giving a contribution proportional to  $2\delta_s/g_{\min}^2$ . The window dominates:

$$\frac{\delta_s}{g_{\min}^2} \propto \frac{\sqrt{A_2}}{A_1(A_1 + 1)\Delta^2} \sqrt{\frac{N}{d_0}}, \quad (5.5.7)$$

yielding the runtime of Theorem 1 in the published paper [14]. For the Ising Hamiltonian with  $A_1, A_2 = O(\text{poly}(n))$  and  $\Delta \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$ , this gives  $T = \tilde{O}(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ , matching the Grover lower bound up to polylogarithmic factors. Chapter 7 carries out this calculation rigorously.

## 5.6 The Central Questions

The framework is now complete. The adiabatic Hamiltonian  $H(s)$  interpolates between the easy initial state and the problem Hamiltonian. The symmetry reduction collapses the  $N$ -dimensional problem to  $M$  dimensions. The eigenvalue equation characterizes the spectrum implicitly, and the two-level approximation near the crossing yields explicit formulas for  $s^*$ ,  $\delta_s$ , and  $g_{\min}$ . The gap is  $\Theta(g_{\min})$  in the crossing window and grows linearly outside it.

The gap bounds in the left and right regions have been stated but not proved. The variational bound for the left region and the resolvent bound for the right region require the construction of the variational ansatz, the Sherman-Morrison resolvent calculation, and the monotonicity analysis for the function  $f(s)$ . Chapter 6 develops both proofs in full.

Given the complete gap profile, the optimal runtime is

$$T = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{\sqrt{A_2}}{A_1(A_1 + 1)\Delta^2} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{N}{d_0}}\right), \quad (5.6.1)$$

where  $\varepsilon$  is the target error. For Ising Hamiltonians, this is  $\tilde{O}(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ , matching the lower bound of Farhi, Goldstone, and Gutmann [5]. Adiabatic quantum optimization achieves the Grover speedup. Chapter 7 derives this rigorously.

The local adaptive schedule requires knowing  $s^*$  to precision  $O(\delta_s) = O(2^{-n/2})$ , which requires knowing  $A_1$  to comparable precision. Approximating  $A_1$  to additive accuracy  $1/\text{poly}(n)$  is NP-hard: two queries to such an oracle suffice to solve 3-SAT. Computing  $A_1$  exactly, or to accuracy  $O(2^{-\text{poly}(n)})$ , is #P-hard: polynomial interpolation extracts all degeneracies  $d_k$  from  $O(\text{poly}(n))$  exact queries. There is an exponential gap between the precision needed ( $O(2^{-n/2})$ ) and the precision at which the problem is already NP-hard ( $1/\text{poly}(n)$ ). Chapter 8 proves both results.

In the circuit model, Grover’s algorithm achieves  $\tilde{O}(\sqrt{N/d_0})$  without pre-computing any spectral parameter: the oracle queries gather the needed information adaptively during execution. The adiabatic framework requires the schedule to be fixed before the evolution begins, necessitating the NP-hard pre-computation. This asymmetry is not an artifact of the analysis but a genuine difference between the two computational models. The paper [14] calls this “optimality with limitations”: the adiabatic speedup exists but is contingent on solving a hard problem first. Chapter 9 characterizes this information-runtime tradeoff precisely, proving a separation theorem for uninformed schedules, a smooth interpolation for partial information, and an adaptive measurement protocol that circumvents the classical hardness.

For the running example, the limitation vanishes:  $A_1 = (N-1)/N \approx 1$  is trivially known, so  $s^* \approx 1/2$  requires no hard computation. The complexity arises only for problem Hamiltonians with rich spectral structure, where the degeneracies  $d_k$  and energy gaps  $E_k - E_0$  are not known in advance. The Ising Hamiltonian encoding an NP-hard problem is precisely such a case.

# Chapter 6

## Spectral Analysis

Chapter 5 established the crossing window  $\mathcal{I}_{s^*}$  where the spectral gap satisfies  $g(s) = \Theta(g_{\min})$ , and stated two bounds for the regions outside: a linear lower bound to the left ([Lemma 5.5.1](#)) and a linear lower bound to the right ([Lemma 5.5.2](#)). The complete gap profile determines the runtime of the adiabatic algorithm through the integral  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-2} ds$ : a piecewise linear lower bound on  $g(s)$  makes this integral tractable, splitting it into three closed-form pieces whose relative contributions identify the bottleneck. This chapter proves both lemmas.

The two proofs use different techniques, reflecting different spectral structures on each side of the crossing. To the left of  $s^*$ , the ground energy  $\lambda_0(s)$  sits below  $sE_0$  while the first excited energy  $\lambda_1(s)$  sits above it. The variational principle bounds how far below  $sE_0$  the ground energy can be, yielding a linear gap bound. To the right of  $s^*$ , the eigenvalues of  $sH_z$  crowd the interval  $[sE_0, sE_1]$ , and the variational approach no longer applies. Instead, a resolvent identity combined with the Sherman-Morrison formula for rank-one perturbations tracks the gap through this congested region. The resulting piecewise linear profile — steep on the left, shallower on the right, flat in the window — feeds directly into the runtime calculation of Chapter 7.

### 6.1 Gap to the Left of the Crossing

The eigenvalue equation ([Lemma 5.3.1](#)) places the ground state energy at  $\lambda_0(s) < sE_0$  and the first excited energy at  $\lambda_1(s) \in (sE_0, sE_1)$ . The gap  $g(s) = \lambda_1(s) - \lambda_0(s)$  is therefore positive, but these bounds alone give only the trivial estimate  $g(s) < s\Delta$ . For the runtime integral, we need a tight lower bound that captures the linear growth of the gap as  $s$  decreases away from  $s^*$ .

The strategy is to tighten the upper bound on  $\lambda_0(s)$ . Two approaches give the same result. The first uses the variational principle: for any normalized state  $|\phi\rangle$ , the ground energy satisfies  $\lambda_0(s) \leq \langle \phi | H(s) | \phi \rangle$ , so a well-chosen ansatz produces a quantitative upper bound. The second uses concavity: since  $\lambda_0(s) = \min_{|\psi\rangle} \langle \psi | H(s) | \psi \rangle$  is the pointwise minimum of affine functions in  $s$ , it is concave, and any tangent line lies above it. The variational approach is more direct — it produces the bound in a single calculation — so we present it here.

**Lemma 6.1.1** (Gap to the left of the crossing). *For any  $s \in \mathcal{I}_{s^*}^- = [0, s^* - \delta_s)$ , the spectral gap of  $H(s)$  satisfies*

$$g(s) \geq \frac{A_1(A_1 + 1)}{A_2} (s^* - s). \quad (6.1.1)$$

*Proof.* We upper-bound  $\lambda_0(s)$  via the variational principle and lower-bound  $\lambda_1(s)$  from the eigenvalue equation.

The ansatz must live in the span of  $\{|k\rangle : k \geq 1\}$ , orthogonal to the ground-state component  $|0\rangle$ , and should concentrate amplitude on levels close to  $E_0$  where the energy expectation is lowest. The natural weighting is the inverse energy gap: levels near  $E_0$  receive more amplitude. Requiring unit norm fixes the overall scale, giving

$$|\phi\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{A_2 N}} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{\sqrt{d_k}}{E_k - E_0} |k\rangle. \quad (6.1.2)$$

This weighting arises naturally in first-order perturbation theory: the correction to the ground state  $|E_0\rangle$  of  $sH_z$  due to the perturbation  $-(1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$  has coefficients proportional to  $\langle E_k | \psi_0 \rangle / (E_k - E_0) = \sqrt{d_k/N} / (E_k - E_0)$ , which is exactly the form above up to normalization. Normalization is immediate:

$$\langle \phi | \phi \rangle = \frac{1}{A_2 N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{(E_k - E_0)^2} = \frac{A_2}{A_2} = 1. \quad (6.1.3)$$

To compute  $\langle \phi | H(s) | \phi \rangle$ , decompose  $H(s) = -(1-s) |\psi_0\rangle \langle \psi_0| + s(H_z - E_0) + sE_0$ . Each term contributes separately.

The projector term gives

$$-(1-s) |\langle \psi_0 | \phi \rangle|^2 = -(1-s) \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{A_2 N}} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{(E_k - E_0) \sqrt{N}} \right)^2 = -(1-s) \frac{A_1^2}{A_2}, \quad (6.1.4)$$

where  $\langle \psi_0 | \phi \rangle = A_1 / \sqrt{A_2}$  follows from  $\langle \psi_0 | k = \sqrt{d_k/N}$  and the definition of  $A_1$ .

The shifted diagonal term gives

$$s \langle \phi | (H_z - E_0) | \phi \rangle = \frac{s}{A_2 N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{(E_k - E_0)^2} \cdot (E_k - E_0) = \frac{s}{A_2 N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k - E_0} = \frac{s A_1}{A_2}. \quad (6.1.5)$$

The constant term contributes  $sE_0 \langle \phi | \phi \rangle = sE_0$ . Combining:

$$\lambda_0(s) \leq \langle \phi | H(s) | \phi \rangle = sE_0 - (1-s) \frac{A_1^2}{A_2} + s \frac{A_1}{A_2} = sE_0 + \frac{A_1}{A_2} (s(1+A_1) - A_1). \quad (6.1.6)$$

Since  $s^*(1+A_1) = A_1$ , we have  $s(1+A_1) - A_1 = (1+A_1)(s-s^*) = (s-s^*)/(1-s^*)$ , so

$$\lambda_0(s) \leq sE_0 + \frac{A_1}{A_2} \cdot \frac{s-s^*}{1-s^*}. \quad (6.1.7)$$

For  $s < s^*$ , the second term is negative, confirming  $\lambda_0(s) < sE_0$ .

For the first excited state, the eigenvalue equation (Lemma 5.3.1) confines  $\lambda_1(s)$  to the interval  $(sE_0, sE_1)$ , so

$$\lambda_1(s) \geq sE_0. \quad (6.1.8)$$

The gap is therefore

$$g(s) = \lambda_1(s) - \lambda_0(s) \geq sE_0 - sE_0 - \frac{A_1}{A_2} \cdot \frac{s-s^*}{1-s^*} = \frac{A_1}{A_2} \cdot \frac{s^* - s}{1-s^*}. \quad (6.1.9)$$

Since  $1/(1-s^*) = A_1 + 1$ , we obtain  $g(s) \geq A_1(A_1+1)(s^* - s)/A_2$ .  $\square$

At the left boundary of the crossing window,  $s = s^* - \delta_s$ , the bound gives

$$g(s^* - \delta_s) \geq \frac{A_1(A_1+1)}{A_2} \cdot \delta_s = \hat{g}, \quad (6.1.10)$$

using  $A_1(A_1+1)\delta_s/A_2 = \hat{g}$  from Eq. (5.4.10). Since  $g_{\min} = (1 \pm O(\eta))\hat{g}$  from Eq. (5.4.9), the gap at the window boundary is  $\Theta(g_{\min})$ , confirming that the piecewise bounds are consistent across regions and that the minimum gap lies within  $\mathcal{I}_{s^*}$ .

An alternative derivation uses concavity. Since  $\lambda_0(s) = \min_{|\psi\rangle} \langle \psi | H(s) | \psi \rangle$  is the pointwise minimum of affine functions in  $s$ , it is concave. The Hellmann-Feynman theorem gives the second derivative explicitly:

$$\ddot{\lambda}_0(s) = -2 \sum_{j \geq 1} \frac{|\langle \phi_j(s) | \dot{H} | \phi_0(s) \rangle|^2}{\lambda_j(s) - \lambda_0(s)} \leq 0,$$

where  $\dot{H} = H_z + |\psi_0\rangle \langle \psi_0|$  and  $|\phi_j(s)\rangle$  are the instantaneous eigenstates. Concavity implies any tangent lies above the function: the tangent to  $\lambda_0$  at  $s^*$  gives  $\lambda_0(s) \leq \lambda_0(s^*) + \lambda'_0(s^*)(s-s^*)$ , an upper bound of the same form as (6.1.7), though the variational approach gives slightly sharper constants.

For the running example ( $M=2$ ,  $d_0=1$ ,  $d_1=N-1$ ,  $E_0=0$ ,  $E_1=1$ ), the ansatz reduces to  $|\phi\rangle = |1\rangle$ , and the bound becomes

$$g(s) \geq \frac{(N-1)/N \cdot (2N-1)/N}{(N-1)/N} \left( \frac{1}{2} - s \right) = \frac{2N-1}{N} \left( \frac{1}{2} - s \right) \approx 2 \left( \frac{1}{2} - s \right). \quad (6.1.11)$$

The exact gap  $g(s) = \sqrt{(2s-1)^2 + 4s(1-s)/N}$  at  $s=1/4$  equals  $\sqrt{1/4 + 3/(4N)} \approx 1/2$ , while the bound gives  $(2N-1)/(4N) \approx 1/2$ . The bound is tight near  $s^*$  and only becomes loose as  $s$  approaches 0, where the true gap approaches 1 while the bound continues growing. Since the runtime integral is dominated by the crossing window, this looseness far from  $s^*$  has negligible effect.

## 6.2 Gap to the Right of the Crossing

Bounding the spectral gap to the right of  $s^*$  is the main technical challenge of this chapter. The variational principle that worked on the left does not extend: it provides upper bounds on  $\lambda_0(s)$ , but what we need on the right is a lower bound on  $\lambda_1(s) - \lambda_0(s)$  that captures the linear reopening of the gap. The variational principle bounds ground energies from above, not excited energies from below.

The obstacle is structural. On the left, the first excited eigenvalue  $\lambda_1(s)$  is bounded below by  $sE_0$  from the eigenvalue equation, giving a clean reference point. On the right,  $\lambda_1(s)$  lies between  $sE_0$  and  $sE_1$ , but so do eigenvalues from the higher levels of  $sH_z$ , which undergo their own avoided crossings with the first excited state. Tracking  $\lambda_1(s)$  through this congested region requires a tool that bounds the distance from a given point to the spectrum without identifying individual eigenvalues. The eigenvalue equation (Lemma 5.3.1) characterizes the full spectrum implicitly — each eigenvalue satisfies a transcendental equation — but it does not yield a closed-form bound on any individual eigenvalue that captures the gap's linear dependence on  $s - s^*$ .

The resolvent provides exactly this. For a self-adjoint operator  $A$  with spectrum  $\sigma(A)$  and any  $\lambda \notin \sigma(A)$ , the resolvent

$$R_A(\lambda) = (\lambda I - A)^{-1} \quad (6.2.1)$$

is a bounded operator whose norm equals the inverse distance from  $\lambda$  to the spectrum:

$$\|R_A(\lambda)\| = \frac{1}{\text{dist}(\lambda, \sigma(A))}. \quad (6.2.2)$$

This follows from the spectral theorem: in the eigenbasis of  $A$  with eigenvalues  $\{\lambda_j\}$ , the resolvent is diagonal with entries  $1/(\lambda - \lambda_j)$ , and its operator norm is the maximum absolute value  $\max_j |1/(\lambda - \lambda_j)| = 1/\min_j |\lambda - \lambda_j|$ . If a point  $\gamma$  lies between two consecutive eigenvalues  $\lambda_0$  and  $\lambda_1$ , then  $\text{dist}(\gamma, \sigma(A)) = \min(\gamma - \lambda_0, \lambda_1 - \gamma) \leq g/2$ , since the minimum of two non-negative numbers summing to  $g$  is at most  $g/2$ . Therefore  $\|R_A(\gamma)\| = 1/\text{dist}(\gamma, \sigma(A)) \geq 2/g$ , and the useful contrapositive is

$$g(s) \geq \frac{2}{\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\|}. \quad (6.2.3)$$

Bounding the gap from below reduces to bounding the resolvent norm from above. This resolvent approach to rank-one perturbations has precedent in the spatial search literature. Childs and Goldstone [19] showed that a continuous-time quantum walk on the complete graph finds a marked vertex in  $O(\sqrt{N})$  time by analyzing the resolvent of the graph Laplacian perturbed by a rank-one oracle projector — the same algebraic structure as our adiabatic Hamiltonian  $H(s) = sH_z - (1 - s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$ , with the Laplacian replaced by the diagonal problem Hamiltonian. Chakraborty, Novo, and Roland [16] extended this to general graphs, proving optimality of spatial search for almost all graphs using the Sherman-Morrison identity to bound the resolvent of rank-one perturbations. Their technique transfers directly to the adiabatic setting: the algebraic steps are identical, with the spectral parameters  $A_1, A_2$  replacing the graph-theoretic quantities.

The parallel merits a closer look, because the reader who understands it will recognize the resolvent technique as a general tool rather than a problem-specific trick. Spatial search via continuous-time quantum walks solves the following problem: given a graph  $G$  on  $N$  vertices with a subset  $S$  of marked vertices, find a marked vertex by evolving the initial state  $|s\rangle = (1/\sqrt{N})\sum_v |v\rangle$  under the Hamiltonian  $H_{\text{search}} = -\gamma L - \sum_{v \in S} |v\rangle\langle v|$ , where  $L$  is the graph Laplacian and  $\gamma > 0$  is a tunable parameter [19]. The oracle term  $-\sum_{v \in S} |v\rangle\langle v|$  is a rank-one projector when  $|S| = 1$  (or more generally a low-rank perturbation), and the Laplacian  $L$  plays the role of the diagonal Hamiltonian  $sH_z$ : its eigenvalues are the graph's spectrum, and the spectral gap of  $L$  determines the time scale of the walk. The mapping is:  $L \leftrightarrow sH_z$ , the oracle projector  $\leftrightarrow (1 - s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$ , the algebraic connectivity of  $G \leftrightarrow$  the spectral gap  $\Delta$  of  $H_z$ , and the effective resistance at the marked vertex  $\leftrightarrow$  the spectral parameter  $A_2$ . The resolvent bound proceeds identically in both settings: place a line  $\gamma(s)$  between the two lowest eigenvalues, apply the Sherman-Morrison formula to decompose the resolvent of the rank-one perturbation into the known resolvent of the diagonal operator plus a correction, and bound the correction using the spectral parameters. The reason this works is structural: rank-one perturbations of diagonal operators admit Sherman-Morrison inversion regardless of the dimension or the specific eigenvalue distribution, reducing the spectral gap problem to bounding a single rational function of the parameters.

The connection also explains why the same constants ( $k = 1/4$ ,  $f(s^*) = 4$ ) appear in both analyses. These values are artifacts of the line-placement optimization — balancing the denominator's positivity against the numerator's growth in the function  $f(s)$  — and depend only on the rank-one structure, not on whether the underlying operator is a graph Laplacian or a problem Hamiltonian. Any future application of this technique to a new rank-one perturbation will face the same optimization, with the same constants serving as a starting point.

Since  $H(s) = sH_z - (1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$  is a rank-one perturbation of  $sH_z$ , we can invert its resolvent explicitly. The Sherman-Morrison identity [17] states that for an invertible operator  $A$  and vectors  $|u\rangle, |v\rangle$ ,

$$(A + |u\rangle\langle v|)^{-1} = A^{-1} - \frac{A^{-1}|u\rangle\langle v|A^{-1}}{1 + \langle v|A^{-1}|u\rangle}, \quad (6.2.4)$$

provided  $1 + \langle v|A^{-1}|u\rangle \neq 0$ . Applying this to the resolvent of  $H(s)$  decomposes it into the resolvent of  $sH_z$  (whose spectrum is known explicitly) and a correction from the rank-one term  $-(1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$ . The triangle inequality then yields an upper bound on  $\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\|$ .

The strategy is: choose a line  $\gamma(s)$  that lies between  $\lambda_0(s)$  and  $\lambda_1(s)$  for all  $s \geq s^*$ , apply the Sherman-Morrison decomposition, bound each piece using the spectral parameters  $A_1$  and  $A_2$ , and show that the resulting bound on  $\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\|$  yields a linear lower bound on  $g(s)$ .

The simplest choice for  $\gamma(s)$  is a line starting at  $sE_0$  when  $s = s^*$  and ending between  $E_0$  and  $E_1$  at  $s = 1$ : take  $\beta(s) = a(s-s^*)/(1-s^*)$  with  $a < \Delta$  and set  $\gamma(s) = sE_0 + \beta(s)$ . With  $a = \Delta/6$ , the function  $f(s)$  controlling the resolvent bound can be shown to satisfy  $f(s) \leq 1$  for all  $s \geq s^*$ , giving  $g(s) \geq \beta(s) = (\Delta/6)(s-s^*)/(1-s^*)$ . This bound has a problem: at the window boundary  $s = s^* + \delta_s$ , it gives  $g(s^* + \delta_s) \geq (\Delta/6) \cdot \delta_s/(1-s^*) = (\Delta A_2)/(6A_1) \cdot g_{\min}$ . Since  $\Delta A_2 \leq A_1$ , this is at most  $g_{\min}/6$ , and for Hamiltonians with  $\Delta A_2 \ll A_1$ , it can be polynomially smaller than  $g_{\min}$ . At  $s = s^*$  itself, the bound gives  $g(s^*) \geq 0$ , missing the true gap entirely.

The failure has a geometric explanation. At  $s^*$ , the ground energy  $\lambda_0(s^*)$  is not at  $s^*E_0$  but rather  $g_{\min}/2$  below it. The line  $\gamma(s)$  passes through  $s^*E_0$  at  $s = s^*$ , so it sits between the two eigenvalues but with zero margin below. The resolvent norm at a point equidistant from two eigenvalues has norm  $2/g$ , but at a point touching one eigenvalue, the norm diverges. The line must start with  $O(g_{\min})$  separation from both eigenvalues at  $s^*$ .

The fix is to shift the line's origin from  $s^*$  to a point  $s_0 < s^*$  so that  $\beta(s^*) = k g_{\min}$  for a constant  $k < 1$ . With  $\beta(s) = a(s-s_0)/(1-s_0)$ , the constraint  $\beta(s^*) = k g_{\min}$  determines

$$s_0 = s^* - \frac{k g_{\min}(1-s^*)}{a - k g_{\min}}. \quad (6.2.5)$$

The line now passes through  $\gamma(s^*) = s^*E_0 + k g_{\min}$ , which lies between  $\lambda_0(s^*)$  and  $\lambda_1(s^*)$  when  $k$  is chosen appropriately. The price is that  $s_0 < s^*$  introduces additional terms in the monotonicity analysis for  $f(s)$ , requiring a careful choice of  $a$ .

**Lemma 6.2.1** (Gap to the right of the crossing). *Assume  $A_1 \geq 1/2$ . Let  $k = 1/4$ ,  $a = 4k^2\Delta/3 = \Delta/12$ , and  $s_0$  as in Eq. (6.2.5). Then for all  $s \geq s^*$ , the spectral gap of  $H(s)$  satisfies*

$$g(s) \geq \frac{\Delta}{30} \cdot \frac{s-s_0}{1-s_0}. \quad (6.2.6)$$

*Proof.* Set  $\gamma(s) = sE_0 + \beta(s)$  with  $\beta(s) = a(s-s_0)/(1-s_0)$ . We bound  $\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\|$  from above using the Sherman-Morrison formula.

Since  $H(s) = sH_z - (1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$ , the resolvent of  $H(s)$  at  $\gamma$  satisfies, via Eq. (6.2.4) and the triangle inequality,

$$\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\| \leq \|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)\| + (1-s) \frac{\|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)\|}{1 + (1-s)\langle\psi_0|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle}. \quad (6.2.7)$$

The unperturbed resolvent  $R_{sH_z}(\gamma)$  is diagonal in the  $|k\rangle$  basis with entries  $1/(\gamma - sE_k) = 1/(\beta - s(E_k - E_0))$  for  $k \geq 1$  and  $1/\beta$  for  $k = 0$ . The nearest eigenvalue of  $sH_z$  to  $\gamma$  is  $sE_0$ , at distance  $\beta$ , so  $\|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)\| = 1/\beta$ .

We bound the numerator and denominator of the second term separately. Both require that  $\beta(s) \leq s(E_k - E_0)/2$  for all  $k \geq 1$ , which ensures the Taylor expansion in powers of  $\beta/(s(E_k - E_0))$  converges rapidly. Since  $\beta(s) \leq a = \Delta/12$  and  $s(E_k - E_0) \geq s^*\Delta \geq \Delta/3$  (using  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1) \geq 1/3$ , which holds when  $A_1 \geq 1/2$ ), we have  $\beta \leq \Delta/12 < \Delta/6 \leq s(E_k - E_0)/2$ . The condition  $A_1 \geq 1/2$  requires that the spectral gaps  $E_k - E_0$  are not too large relative to  $d_0$ ; when  $A_1 < 1/2$ , the crossing occurs at  $s^* < 1/3$  and the ground-state degeneracy  $d_0$  is large enough that random sampling finds a solution with constant probability, making the adiabatic approach unnecessary.

**Numerator bound.** The squared norm of  $R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle$  expands as

$$\|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle\|^2 = \frac{d_0}{N\beta^2} + \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{(s(E_k - E_0) - \beta)^2}. \quad (6.2.8)$$

Using  $s(E_k - E_0) - \beta \geq s(E_k - E_0)/2$ , each term in the sum is at most  $4d_k/(Ns^2(E_k - E_0)^2)$ , giving

$$\|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)\| \leq \|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle\|^2 \leq \frac{d_0}{N\beta^2} + \frac{4A_2}{s^2}. \quad (6.2.9)$$

**Denominator bound.** Expanding the expectation value:

$$\begin{aligned} 1 + (1-s)\langle\psi_0|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle &= 1 + \frac{(1-s)d_0}{N\beta} - \frac{1-s}{N} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{s(E_k - E_0) - \beta} \\ &= 1 + \frac{(1-s)d_0}{N\beta} - \frac{1-s}{s} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{N(E_k - E_0)} \sum_{\ell=0}^{\infty} \left( \frac{\beta}{s(E_k - E_0)} \right)^\ell. \end{aligned} \quad (6.2.10)$$

Using  $\beta/(s(E_k - E_0)) \leq 1/2$  to bound the geometric series by  $1 + 2\beta/(s(E_k - E_0))$ :

$$1 + (1-s)\langle\psi_0|R_{sH_z}(\gamma)|\psi_0\rangle \geq 1 + \frac{(1-s)d_0}{N\beta} - (1-s) \left( \frac{A_1}{s} + \frac{2A_2\beta}{s^2} \right). \quad (6.2.11)$$

**Collecting terms.** Substituting the bounds (6.2.9) and (6.2.11) into (6.2.7) and factoring:

$$\|R_{H(s)}(\gamma)\| \leq \frac{1}{\beta} (1 + f(s)), \quad (6.2.12)$$

and

$$f(s) = \frac{\frac{d_0}{N} s^2(1-s) + 4A_2\beta^2(1-s)}{\frac{d_0}{N} s^2(1-s) + \beta s \frac{s-s^*}{1-s^*} - 2A_2\beta^2(1-s)}. \quad (6.2.13)$$

To obtain this form, multiply numerator and denominator of the second term in (6.2.7) by  $\beta$ , then multiply by  $s^2(1-s)$  to clear fractions. The key step is rewriting the denominator's constant-plus-linear terms. Using  $A_1 = s^*/(1-s^*)$ :

$$1 - \frac{(1-s)A_1}{s} + \frac{(1-s)d_0}{N\beta} = \frac{s-s^*}{s(1-s^*)} + \frac{(1-s)d_0}{N\beta}, \quad (6.2.14)$$

since  $1 - A_1(1-s)/s = (s - A_1(1-s))/s = (s - s^*(1-s)/(1-s^*))/s = (s(1-s^*) - s^*(1-s))/(s(1-s^*)) = (s-s^*)/(s(1-s^*))$ . Multiplying through by  $\beta s^2(1-s)$  and collecting the Taylor-bounded terms into the  $A_2\beta^2$  contributions gives Eq. (6.2.13). The fraction  $d_0/N$  measures the density of ground states in the computational basis.

The numerator of  $f(s)$  measures the rank-one perturbation's effect on the resolvent: the  $d_0/N$  term comes from the  $|0\rangle$  component of  $|\psi_0\rangle$  (the ground-state overlap), while the  $A_2$  term comes from the excited components. The denominator captures the spectral rigidity: the term  $\beta s(s-s^*)/(1-s^*)$  grows as  $\gamma$  moves away from the crossing, stabilizing the resolvent against the perturbation. Near  $s^*$ , the denominator is small (the gap is small), so  $f(s^*)$  is  $O(1)$ . As  $s$  increases, the denominator grows and  $f(s) \rightarrow 0$ .

From (6.2.12) and (6.2.3), the spectral gap satisfies

$$g(s) \geq \frac{2\beta(s)}{1+f(s)} \geq \frac{2\beta(s)}{1+\max_{s \geq s^*} f(s)}. \quad (6.2.15)$$

If  $f$  is monotonically decreasing on  $[s^*, 1]$ , then  $\max_{s \geq s^*} f(s) = f(s^*)$ , and the bound becomes  $g(s) \geq 2\beta(s)/(1+f(s^*))$ , which is linear in  $s - s_0$ .

**Monotonicity of  $f$ .** We show  $f'(s) < 0$  for  $s \in [s^*, 1]$ . Writing  $f = u/v$ , the sign of  $f'$  is determined by  $u'v - uv'$ . After expanding and cancelling common terms, the expression reduces to three contributions: two are manifestly negative, while a third — positive and proportional to  $(d_0/N)s_0$  — arises from having shifted the line's origin below  $s^*$ . The proof amounts to showing the negative terms dominate. Write  $f = u/v$  with

$$\begin{aligned} u &= \frac{d_0}{N} s^2(1-s) + 4A_2\beta^2(1-s), \\ v &= \frac{d_0}{N} s^2(1-s) + \beta s \frac{s-s^*}{1-s^*} - 2A_2\beta^2(1-s). \end{aligned} \quad (6.2.16)$$

Then  $f' = (u'v - uv')/v^2$ , so the sign of  $f'$  is determined by  $u'v - uv'$ .

Computing  $u'$  and  $v'$  using  $\beta' = a/(1 - s_0)$ :

$$\begin{aligned} u' &= \frac{4aA_2\beta}{1-s_0}(2+s_0-3s) + \frac{d_0}{N}s(2-3s), \\ v' &= \frac{a(3s^2-2s(s^*+s_0)+s^*s_0)}{(1-s_0)(1-s^*)} - \frac{2aA_2\beta}{1-s_0}(2+s_0-3s) + \frac{d_0}{N}s(2-3s). \end{aligned} \quad (6.2.17)$$

Expanding  $u'v$  and  $uv'$  and taking the difference, two terms cancel exactly: the  $(d_0/N)^2 s^3(2-3s)(1-s)$  term and the  $8aA_2^2\beta^3(1-s)(2+s_0-3s)/(1-s_0)$  term. The remaining expression has three terms [14]:

$$\begin{aligned} u'v - uv' &= -\frac{4aA_2\beta^2}{(1-s_0)(1-s^*)} \left( s^2(1+s_0-s^*) - 2ss_0 + s^*s_0 \right) \\ &\quad + \frac{12aA_2\frac{d_0}{N}\beta}{1-s_0} s(1-s)^2 s_0 \\ &\quad - \frac{\frac{d_0}{N}s^2a}{(1-s_0)(1-s^*)} \left( -s^2(s^*+s_0-1) + 2ss_0s^* - s^*s_0 \right). \end{aligned} \quad (6.2.18)$$

The first and third terms are negative; the second is positive (it is the only term involving  $(d_0/N)s_0$ , which arises from the shift of  $s_0$  below  $s^*$ ). We must show the first negative term dominates the positive one.

Factor out  $-4aA_2\beta/(1-s_0)$  from the sum of the first two terms:

$$-\frac{4aA_2\beta}{1-s_0} \left( \frac{\beta}{1-s^*} \left( s^2(1+s_0-s^*) - 2ss_0 + s^*s_0 \right) - \frac{3d_0}{N} s_0 s(1-s)^2 \right). \quad (6.2.19)$$

The quadratic  $s^2(1+s_0-s^*) - 2ss_0 + s^*s_0$  is a convex function of  $s$  (the leading coefficient  $1+s_0-s^* > 0$  since  $s_0 < s^*$ ), minimized at some  $s_m < s^*$ , and positive for  $s \geq s^*$ : at  $s = s^*$ , it evaluates to  $s^*(1-s^*)(s^*-s_0) > 0$ . The cubic  $s(1-s)^2$  is maximized at  $s = 1/3 \leq s^*$ . Therefore, on  $[s^*, 1]$ , the bracket in (6.2.19) is bounded below by its value at  $s = s^*$ :

$$\frac{a(s^*-s_0)^2}{1-s_0} - \frac{3d_0}{N} s_0(1-s^*)^2. \quad (6.2.20)$$

Using  $s_0 \leq s^*$  and  $s^* - s_0 = k g_{\min}(1-s^*)/(a - k g_{\min})$ , this is positive whenever

$$a < \frac{4}{3}k^2 \frac{A_1}{A_2}. \quad (6.2.21)$$

Since  $\Delta A_2 \leq A_1$  (because  $A_2 \leq \sum_{k \geq 1} d_k/(N(E_k - E_0)^2) \leq A_1/\Delta$ ), the choice  $a = (4/3)k^2\Delta$  satisfies (6.2.21). With this choice,  $u'v - uv' < 0$  on  $[s^*, 1]$ , so  $f$  is monotonically decreasing.

**Evaluating  $f(s^*)$ .** At  $s = s^*$ ,  $\beta(s^*) = k g_{\min}$ . The term  $\beta s(s-s^*)/(1-s^*)$  vanishes, so

$$f(s^*) = \frac{\frac{d_0}{N}s^{*2}(1-s^*) + 4A_2k^2g_{\min}^2(1-s^*)}{\frac{d_0}{N}s^{*2}(1-s^*) - 2A_2k^2g_{\min}^2(1-s^*)}. \quad (6.2.22)$$

Replacing  $g_{\min}$  by its leading-order expression  $\hat{g} = 2s^*\sqrt{d_0/(NA_2)}$  from Eq. (5.4.9) (valid up to a  $(1 \pm O(\eta))$  factor that does not affect the final constant), we have  $A_2k^2\hat{g}^2 = 4k^2s^{*2}d_0/N$ . Substituting:

$$f(s^*) = \frac{1+16k^2}{1-8k^2}. \quad (6.2.23)$$

For  $k = 1/4$ :  $f(s^*) = (1+1)/(1-1/2) = 4$ , so  $1+f(s^*) = 5$ .

**Final bound.** From (6.2.15):

$$g(s) \geq \frac{2\beta(s)}{1+f(s^*)} = \frac{2a}{1+f(s^*)} \cdot \frac{s-s_0}{1-s_0}. \quad (6.2.24)$$

The prefactor evaluates to

$$\frac{2a}{1+f(s^*)} = \frac{2 \cdot (4/3)k^2\Delta}{1+(1+16k^2)/(1-8k^2)} = \frac{4}{3}k^2 \cdot \frac{1-8k^2}{1+4k^2} \cdot \Delta. \quad (6.2.25)$$

The function  $P(k) = (4/3)k^2(1-8k^2)/(1+4k^2)$  is maximized at  $k_{\text{opt}} = \frac{1}{2}\sqrt{\sqrt{3/2}-1} \approx 0.237$ , where  $P(k_{\text{opt}}) = \frac{1}{3}(5-2\sqrt{6}) \approx 0.034$ . For  $k = 1/4$ :

$$P(1/4) = \frac{4}{3} \cdot \frac{1}{16} \cdot \frac{1/2}{5/4} = \frac{1}{30}. \quad (6.2.26)$$

Therefore  $g(s) \geq (\Delta/30)(s-s_0)/(1-s_0)$ .  $\square$

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $\Delta = 1$ ), the bound gives  $g(s) \geq (1/30)(s - s_0)/(1 - s_0)$ , where  $s_0 = 1/2 - O(1/\sqrt{N})$  is close to  $s^* \approx 1/2$  for large  $N$ . Near  $s = 3/4$ , the exact gap from Eq. (5.3.15) is  $g(3/4) = \sqrt{1/4 + 3/(4N)} \approx 1/2$ , while the bound gives approximately  $(1/30)(1/4)/(1/2) = 1/60$ . The bound is conservative by a factor of approximately 30 but correctly captures the linear growth. This constant is the price of a clean, uniform bound valid for all problem Hamiltonians satisfying the spectral condition.

### 6.3 The Complete Gap Profile

Combining the results of this chapter with those of Chapter 5, the spectral gap  $g(s)$  is bounded below across all of  $[0, 1]$ .

**Theorem 6.3.1** (Complete gap profile). *Let  $H_z$  satisfy the spectral condition (Definition 5.2.2). The spectral gap of  $H(s) = -(1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + sH_z$  satisfies, for all  $s \in [0, 1]$ :*

$$g(s) \geq \begin{cases} \frac{A_1(A_1 + 1)}{A_2} (s^* - s), & s \in \mathcal{I}_{s\leftarrow} = [0, s^* - \delta_s], \\ g_{\min}, & s \in \mathcal{I}_{s^*} = [s^* - \delta_s, s^* + \delta_s], \\ \frac{\Delta}{30} \cdot \frac{s - s_0}{1 - s_0}, & s \in \mathcal{I}_{s\rightarrow} = (s^* + \delta_s, 1], \end{cases} \quad (6.3.1)$$

where  $s_0 = s^* - k g_{\min}(1 - s^*)/(a - k g_{\min})$  with  $k = 1/4$  and  $a = \Delta/12$ .

*Proof.* The three cases follow from Lemma 5.4.2 (window, proved in Chapter 5), Lemma 6.1.1 (left), and Lemma 6.2.1 (right). The right bound holds for all  $s \geq s^*$  and therefore covers  $\mathcal{I}_{s\rightarrow}$ . The window bound  $g(s) \geq g_{\min}$  is tighter than the right bound at  $s^*$  but weaker far from the crossing.  $\square$

The bounds match across region boundaries. At the left boundary  $s = s^* - \delta_s$ :

$$\frac{A_1(A_1 + 1)}{A_2} \cdot \delta_s = \hat{g} = \Theta(g_{\min}), \quad (6.3.2)$$

so the left bound at the window boundary is  $\Theta(g_{\min})$ , consistent with the window bound. At  $s = s^*$ , the right bound gives  $g(s^*) \geq 2\beta(s^*)/(1 + f(s^*)) = 2k g_{\min}/5 = g_{\min}/10$ , which is below  $g_{\min}$  by a constant factor but still  $O(g_{\min})$ . The window bound provides the tighter estimate  $g(s^*) = g_{\min}$ .

The gap profile has a characteristic shape. It forms a broad V centered at  $s^*$ , with a narrow rounded minimum of width approximately  $2\delta_s$ . The left arm has slope  $A_1(A_1 + 1)/A_2$ , which is  $O(\text{poly}(n))$  for Ising Hamiltonians. The right arm has the shallower slope  $\Delta/(30(1 - s_0))$ , controlled by the spectral gap  $\Delta$  of the problem Hamiltonian. The asymmetry in the bounds — steep on the left, shallow on the right — reflects the different proof strategies: the variational bound captures the true slope closely, while the resolvent bound sacrifices tightness for uniform validity across a more complicated spectral landscape. At the endpoints,  $g(0) = 1$  (the initial gap between eigenvalues  $-1$  and  $0$  of  $H_0$ ) and  $g(1) = \Delta$  (the gap of  $H_z$ ).

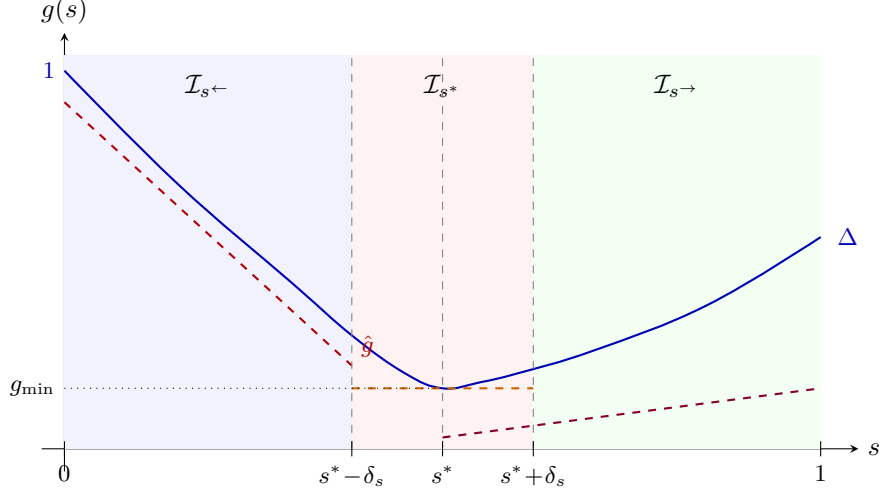


Figure 6.1: Schematic gap profile for  $H(s)$ . The solid curve shows the true spectral gap  $g(s)$ , which equals 1 at  $s = 0$ , dips to  $g_{\min}$  at  $s = s^*$ , and recovers to  $\Delta$  at  $s = 1$ . The left arm is steep (slope  $A_1(A_1 + 1)/A_2$ ); the right arm is shallower (slope controlled by  $\Delta$ ). Dashed lines show the piecewise lower bounds from **Theorem 6.3.1**: linear on the left, constant  $g_{\min}$  in the window, and linear on the right (reaching  $\Delta/30$  at  $s = 1$ ). The right bound is below  $g_{\min}$  at  $s^*$  but remains  $O(g_{\min})$ .

Given any problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$  satisfying the spectral condition, the gap is bounded across  $[0, 1]$  by the piecewise profile of **Theorem 6.3.1**, determined up to constant factors by  $A_1$ ,  $A_2$ ,  $d_0$ , and  $\Delta$ . The minimum gap  $g_{\min} = \Theta(\sqrt{d_0/(NA_2)})$  occurs at  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1)$  and is exponentially small in  $n$  when  $d_0 = O(1)$ . The crossing position depends only on  $A_1$ , not on  $A_2$  or  $d_0$ . More solutions (larger  $d_0$ ) widen the gap; richer spectral structure (larger  $A_2$ ) narrows it. The gap reaches  $\Delta$  at  $s = 1$ , the spectral gap of the problem Hamiltonian itself.

For the running example, the exact gap  $g(s) = \sqrt{(2s-1)^2 + 4s(1-s)/N}$  and the piecewise bound from **Theorem 6.3.1** can be compared directly. The left bound has slope  $(2N-1)/N \approx 2$ , matching the asymptotic slope of the exact gap, which approaches  $2(1-1/N) \approx 2$  away from  $s^*$ . The window bound  $g_{\min} = 1/\sqrt{N}$  is exact. The right bound has slope approximately  $1/15$  near  $s^*$ , weaker than the true slope by a factor of 30, but sufficient for the runtime integral since the window dominates.

The runtime integral  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-2} ds$  splits across the three regions. In the left and right regions,  $g(s) \sim C|s - s^*|$  for constants  $C$ , and

$$\int_{\delta_s}^{s^*} \frac{du}{(Cu)^2} = \frac{1}{C^2} \left( \frac{1}{\delta_s} - \frac{1}{s^*} \right) \leq \frac{1}{C^2 \delta_s}, \quad (6.3.3)$$

which is  $O(1/(C^2 \delta_s))$ . In the window,  $g(s) \geq g_{\min}$  gives  $\int_{s^* - \delta_s}^{s^* + \delta_s} g(s)^{-2} ds \leq 2\delta_s/g_{\min}^2$ . The window contribution  $\delta_s/g_{\min}^2 = \Theta(A_2^{3/2}/(A_1(A_1 + 1)) \cdot \sqrt{N/d_0})$  dominates the outer regions, and the full integral — including the  $\Delta$ -dependent right-arm contribution — yields the runtime  $T = O((\sqrt{A_2}/(A_1(A_1 + 1)\Delta^2))\sqrt{N/d_0})$  that Chapter 7 derives rigorously.

## Chapter 7

# Optimal Schedule

The spectral gap of  $H(s)$  is now bounded below across all of  $[0, 1]$ : a piecewise linear profile ([Theorem 6.3.1](#)) that dips to  $g_{\min}$  at the avoided crossing  $s^*$  and rises linearly on both sides, with slope  $A_1(A_1 + 1)/A_2$  on the left and  $\Delta/30$  on the right. Chapter 5 observed that the runtime scales as  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-2} ds$  (Eq. (5.5.6)), with the crossing window dominating. The exponent in that integral — and hence the speedup — depends on how the evolution rate is matched to the gap structure.

The standard adiabatic theorem, applied with a constant evolution rate, gives a runtime proportional to  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-3} ds$ . For the gap profile of [Theorem 6.3.1](#), the window contributes  $\delta_s/g_{\min}^3$ , which for the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $g_{\min} = 1/\sqrt{N}$ ) gives  $T = O(N)$ : no speedup over classical search. An adaptive schedule whose rate  $K'(s)$  scales inversely with the instantaneous gap concentrates evolution time near the crossing, reducing the controlling integral from  $\int g^{-3} ds$  to  $\int g^{-p} ds$  for  $p \in (1, 2)$ . The resulting runtime is  $T = O((\sqrt{A_2}/(A_1(A_1 + 1)\Delta^2))\sqrt{N/d_0/\varepsilon})$ , achieving the Grover speedup up to spectral factors.

### 7.1 Prior Adiabatic Theorems

The gap profile alone does not determine the runtime: the translation from spectral data to evolution time requires an adiabatic theorem, and the form of the theorem dictates what schedule the algorithm can use. Different adiabatic theorems impose different gap dependences, and the distinction is the difference between  $O(N)$  and  $O(\sqrt{N})$  for the running example.

The earliest rigorous bounds, due to Jansen, Ruskai, and Seiler [20], apply to a constant schedule  $K'(s) = T$  and give a transition probability of order  $O(1/T^2)$ . Their Theorem 3 states that for a state  $\psi \in P(0)$ , the probability of leaving the ground space satisfies

$$(\psi, [1 - P(s)]U_\tau(s)\psi) \leq A(s)^2, \quad (7.1.1)$$

where  $A(s) \leq (1/T)(\|H'\|/g^2)|_{\text{bdry}} + (1/T)\int_0^s (7\sqrt{m}\|H'\|^2/g^3 + \|H'\|/g^2) ds'$ , with  $m$  the multiplicity of the ground eigenvalue and the boundary term evaluated at  $s = 0$  and  $s$ . Setting  $A(s) = \varepsilon$  and solving for  $T$  gives

$$T = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_0^1 \frac{\|H'\|^2}{g(s)^3} ds\right). \quad (7.1.2)$$

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $\|H'\| = O(1)$ ), the integral  $\int_0^1 g^{-3} ds$  is dominated by the  $O(1/\sqrt{N})$ -wide window where  $g \approx 1/\sqrt{N}$ : the contribution is  $(1/\sqrt{N}) \cdot N^{3/2} = N$ . Therefore the JRS bound gives  $T = O(N/\varepsilon)$ , reproducing the classical search complexity. A constant schedule treats every value of  $s$  equally, spending the same physical time per unit of  $s$  whether the gap is  $O(1)$  or  $O(1/\sqrt{N})$ . The integral  $\int g^{-3} ds$  is a consequence of this uniformity: the  $g^{-3}$  dependence means the narrow crossing window contributes overwhelmingly, and no speedup is possible.

The resolution is to make the schedule depend on the gap. Roland and Cerf [4] proposed a *local* adiabatic condition: instead of demanding that the entire evolution be adiabatic with a single time scale  $T$ , demand that each infinitesimal step  $[s, s + ds]$  be adiabatic on its own. The standard adiabatic criterion requires  $|ds/dt| \leq \varepsilon g(s)^2 / |\langle e_1(s) | H'(s) | e_0(s) \rangle|$ , where  $e_0$  and  $e_1$  are the ground and first excited states. Inverting gives  $K'(s) = dt/ds \geq |\langle e_1 | H' | e_0 \rangle| / (\varepsilon g(s)^2)$ . For the running example,  $|\langle e_1 | H' | e_0 \rangle| = O(1)$  since  $H'(s) = |\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + H_z$  is constant, so  $K'(s) \propto 1/g(s)^2$  and the total runtime is

$$T = \frac{C}{\varepsilon} \int_0^1 g(s)^{-2} ds. \quad (7.1.3)$$

The integral can be evaluated explicitly. Writing  $g(s)^2 = (2s - 1)^2 + 4s(1 - s)/N$  and substituting  $u = 2s - 1$ :

$$\int_0^1 g(s)^{-2} ds = \frac{1}{2} \int_{-1}^1 \frac{du}{u^2 + (1 - u^2)/N} = \frac{1}{2} \int_{-1}^1 \frac{N du}{1 + (N - 1)u^2}. \quad (7.1.4)$$

For large  $N$ , the substitution  $v = \sqrt{N - 1} u$  gives  $\frac{N}{2\sqrt{N - 1}} \int_{-\sqrt{N - 1}}^{\sqrt{N - 1}} \frac{dv}{1 + v^2} = \frac{N}{2\sqrt{N - 1}} \cdot 2 \arctan(\sqrt{N - 1}) = O(\sqrt{N})$ , since  $\arctan(\sqrt{N - 1}) \rightarrow \pi/2$ . Therefore  $T = O(\sqrt{N}/\varepsilon)$ , recovering the Grover speedup from a smooth, continuous-time evolution.

The Roland-Cerf construction requires knowing the exact gap  $g(s)$  at every point. For the running example with  $M = 2$  marked items, the gap has a closed form (Eq. (5.3.15)), so this requirement is met. For a general problem Hamiltonian with  $M$  energy levels, the exact gap is unknown — only the piecewise bounds of Theorem 6.3.1 are available. Applying the local adiabatic condition with a lower bound  $g_0(s) \leq g(s)$  instead of the exact gap means the schedule slows down more than necessary (since  $1/g_0^2 \geq 1/g^2$ ), increasing the runtime by at most a constant factor. But the error analysis requires more care: the commutator bounds of the adiabatic theorem involve derivatives of the schedule, and a non-smooth  $g_0$  introduces additional terms. The adaptive schedule of section 7.3 handles these terms through the parameter  $p \in (1, 2)$ .

Several generalizations of these ideas exist. Boixo, Knill, and Somma [21] introduced eigenpath traversal, a discrete framework that replaces continuous adiabatic evolution with a sequence of projections onto ground states of intermediate Hamiltonians  $H(s_0), H(s_1), \dots, H(s_L)$ . Between consecutive segments, phase randomization — deliberately destroying coherence between the ground and excited components — suppresses the accumulation of diabatic errors across segments. The key insight is that coherent errors from successive small transitions can interfere constructively, producing an overall error that grows faster than the sum of individual errors; phase randomization breaks this coherence, converting the error scaling from  $O(1/g_{\min}^2)$  (the standard adiabatic bound, which reflects coherent accumulation) to  $O(1/g_{\min})$  when the gap integral condition  $\int g^{-p} ds = O(g_{\min}^{1-p})$  holds. This condition ensures that the gap profile is sufficiently concentrated near its minimum: a broad, flat gap minimum would require many more segments than a narrow, sharp one. Cunningham and Roland [22] obtained tighter constants and extended the framework to the continuous-time setting; the error bound of section 7.2 is the continuous-time version of their result. Elgart and Hagedorn [23] took a different approach: rather than adapting the schedule to the gap, they used smooth switching functions in a Gevrey class, achieving superpolynomial (but not exponential) suppression of diabatic transitions with runtime  $T \geq K g^{-2} |\ln g|^{6\alpha}$  for Gevrey index  $\alpha$ . The advantage of the adaptive schedule approach is that it requires only a lower bound  $g_0(s) \leq g(s)$ , not the exact gap or special smoothness conditions. This makes it applicable to general adiabatic quantum optimization with the piecewise bounds of Chapter 6.

## 7.2 The Adiabatic Error Bound

The Schrödinger equation  $i d|\psi\rangle/dt = H(s(t))|\psi\rangle$  governs the evolution of a quantum state under the time-dependent Hamiltonian  $H(s)$ , where  $s : [0, T] \rightarrow [0, 1]$  parametrizes the interpolation and  $T$  is the total evolution time. The density matrix formulation  $d\rho/dt = -i[H, \rho]$  accommodates mixed states and simplifies the error analysis. Introduce a reparametrization  $t = K(s)$ , where  $K : [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^+$  is a differentiable, monotonically increasing function called the *schedule*. The chain rule transforms the evolution equation to

$$\frac{d\rho}{ds} = -iK'(s)[H(s), \rho(s)], \quad (7.2.1)$$

where  $K'(s) = dK/ds > 0$  controls the instantaneous evolution rate. The total runtime is  $T = K(1) = \int_0^1 K'(s) ds$ . A large  $K'(s)$  means slow evolution (long physical time per unit of  $s$ ), allowing the state to track the ground state through a small-gap region. A small  $K'(s)$  means fast evolution, appropriate where the gap is large and diabatic transitions are suppressed.

The error of the adiabatic evolution is the probability that the final state does not lie in the ground space of  $H(1)$ :

$$\varepsilon = 1 - \text{Tr}[P(1)\rho(1)], \quad (7.2.2)$$

where  $P(s)$  denotes the projector onto the ground eigenspace of  $H(s)$  and  $\rho(0) = P(0)$  (the system starts in the ground state of  $H(0)$ ). The projector  $P(s)$  and the ground energy  $\lambda_0(s)$  are both functions of  $s$ , varying as the Hamiltonian interpolates from  $H_0$  to  $H_z$ . The operator

$$(H(s) - \lambda_0(s))^+ = \sum_{j \geq 1} \frac{1}{\lambda_j(s) - \lambda_0(s)} |\phi_j(s)\rangle \langle \phi_j(s)| \quad (7.2.3)$$

is the pseudoinverse of  $H(s) - \lambda_0(s)$ : it acts as zero on the ground space and as  $(\lambda_j - \lambda_0)^{-1}$  on the  $j$ -th excited eigenspace. Its operator norm is  $1/g(s)$ , so a small spectral gap amplifies the pseudoinverse.

**Lemma 7.2.1** (Adiabatic error bound [14, 22]). *Let  $H(s)$  be a twice-differentiable path of Hamiltonians with a continuous ground energy  $\lambda_0(s)$  and a spectral gap  $g(s) > 0$  for all  $s \in [0, 1]$ . Let  $K : [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^+$  be a schedule with absolutely continuous derivative  $K'$ . Then the evolution (7.2.1) starting from  $\rho(0) = P(0)$  satisfies*

$$\varepsilon \leq \frac{1}{K'(1)} \|[P'(1), (H(1) - \lambda_0(1))^+]\| + \int_0^1 \frac{1}{K'} \|[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\| ds + \int_0^1 \left| \left( \frac{1}{K'} \right)' \right| \|[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\| ds. \quad (7.2.4)$$

*Proof.* Since  $\rho(0) = P(0)$ , the error is  $\varepsilon = \text{Tr}[P(0)\rho(0)] - \text{Tr}[P(1)\rho(1)] = |\text{Tr}[P\rho]|_0^1$ , so it suffices to track  $\text{Tr}[P(s)\rho(s)]$ . Differentiating:

$$\frac{d}{ds} \text{Tr}[P\rho] = \text{Tr}[P'\rho] + \text{Tr}[P\rho']. \quad (7.2.5)$$

The second term vanishes. Substituting the evolution equation (7.2.1):  $\text{Tr}[P\rho'] = -iK' \text{Tr}[P[H, \rho]]$ . Since  $HP = \lambda_0 P$ , the cyclic property gives  $\text{Tr}[P[H, \rho]] = \text{Tr}[PH\rho - P\rho H] = \lambda_0 \text{Tr}[P\rho] - \text{Tr}[HP\rho] = 0$ .

For  $\text{Tr}[P'\rho]$ , write  $Q = I - P$  and use the decomposition  $P' = PP'Q + QP'P$ , which holds because  $PP'P = 0$  and  $QP'Q = 0$ .<sup>i</sup> Inserting  $Q = (H - \lambda_0)^+(H - \lambda_0)$  and using the identities  $(H - \lambda_0)\rho P = [H, \rho]P$  and  $P\rho(H - \lambda_0) = -P[H, \rho]$  (both consequences of  $HP = \lambda_0 P$ ), a cyclic rearrangement under the trace gives

$$\text{Tr}[P'\rho] = \text{Tr}[PP'(H - \lambda_0)^+[H, \rho]] - \text{Tr}[(H - \lambda_0)^+P'P[H, \rho]]. \quad (7.2.6)$$

Since  $(H - \lambda_0)^+P = P(H - \lambda_0)^+ = 0$  (the pseudoinverse annihilates the ground space),  $PP'(H - \lambda_0)^+$  reduces to  $P'(H - \lambda_0)^+$  and  $(H - \lambda_0)^+P'P$  reduces to  $(H - \lambda_0)^+P'$ , so the two terms combine into a commutator:

$$\text{Tr}[P'\rho] = \text{Tr}[[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+][H, \rho]] = i(K')^{-1} \text{Tr}[[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\rho'], \quad (7.2.7)$$

where the last equality substitutes  $[H, \rho] = i(K')^{-1}\rho'$  from (7.2.1).

Integrating from 0 to 1 gives  $|\text{Tr}[P\rho]|_0^1 = i \int_0^1 (K')^{-1} \text{Tr}[[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\rho'] ds$ . Integration by parts — with  $u = (K')^{-1}[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]$  and  $dv = \rho' ds$  — transfers the derivative from  $\rho$  onto  $u$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Tr}[P\rho]|_0^1 &= i(K'(1))^{-1} \text{Tr}[[P'(1), (H(1) - \lambda_0(1))^+]\rho(1)] \\ &\quad - i \int_0^1 \text{Tr}\left[\left((K')^{-1}[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\right)' + ((K')^{-1})'[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\right] \rho] ds. \end{aligned} \quad (7.2.8)$$

The boundary term at  $s = 0$  vanishes. Since  $\rho(0) = P(0)$ , the commutator trace expands as

$$\text{Tr}[[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]P] = \text{Tr}[P'(H - \lambda_0)^+P] - \text{Tr}[(H - \lambda_0)^+P'P].$$

For the first summand,  $(H - \lambda_0)^+P = 0$  (the pseudoinverse annihilates the ground-space projector), so  $\text{Tr}[P'(H - \lambda_0)^+P] = 0$ . For the second, cyclicity of the trace gives  $\text{Tr}[(H - \lambda_0)^+P'P] = \text{Tr}[P(H - \lambda_0)^+P'] = 0$  by the same identity. Taking absolute values and bounding  $|\text{Tr}[A\rho]| \leq \|A\|$  for any density matrix  $\rho$  yields (7.2.4).  $\square$

The error bound depends on  $H(s)$  only through the commutator  $[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]$  and its derivative. The following bounds express these in terms of the Hamiltonian derivatives  $H'$ ,  $H''$  and the spectral gap  $g$ .

**Lemma 7.2.2** (Projector derivative bounds [14]). *Under the conditions of Lemma 7.2.1:*

$$\|P'(s)\| \leq \frac{2\|H'(s)\|}{g(s)}, \quad (7.2.9)$$

$$\|[P'(s), (H(s) - \lambda_0(s))^+]\| \leq \frac{4\|H'(s)\|}{g(s)^2}, \quad (7.2.10)$$

$$\|[P'(s), (H(s) - \lambda_0(s))^+]\| \leq \frac{40\|H'(s)\|^2}{g(s)^3} + \frac{4\|H''(s)\|}{g(s)^2}. \quad (7.2.11)$$

<sup>i</sup>Differentiating  $P^2 = P$  gives  $P'P + PP' = P'$ . Left-multiplying by  $P$ :  $PP'P + PP' = PP'$ , so  $PP'P = 0$ . Then  $QP'Q = P' - PP' - P'P + PP'P = P' - P' = 0$ .

*Proof of (7.2.9).* Let  $\Gamma$  be a circle in the complex plane centered at  $\lambda_0(s)$  with radius  $g(s)/2$ . The Riesz integral representation of the spectral projector, introduced by Kato [24] in his foundational 1950 proof of the adiabatic theorem, expresses the projector as a contour integral of the resolvent. The integration-by-parts technique for controlling adiabatic transitions that follows is standard in adiabatic perturbation theory, going back to the same work. The representation gives

$$P(s) = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\Gamma} R_{H(s)}(z) dz, \quad (7.2.12)$$

where  $R_{H(s)}(z) = (zI - H(s))^{-1}$  is the resolvent. Differentiating with respect to  $s$ :

$$P'(s) = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\Gamma} R_{H(s)}(z) H'(s) R_{H(s)}(z) dz, \quad (7.2.13)$$

using the resolvent identity  $R'_H = R_H H' R_H$ . On the contour  $\Gamma$ , every point  $z$  lies at distance exactly  $g(s)/2$  from  $\lambda_0(s)$  and at distance at least  $g(s)/2$  from every other eigenvalue (since the nearest eigenvalue is  $\lambda_1(s)$  at distance  $g(s)$  from  $\lambda_0(s)$ ). Therefore  $\|R_{H(s)}(z)\| = 1/\text{dist}(z, \sigma(H(s))) \leq 2/g(s)$  on  $\Gamma$ . Bounding the integral:

$$\|P'(s)\| \leq \frac{1}{2\pi} \oint_{\Gamma} \|R_H(z)\| \cdot \|H'(s)\| \cdot \|R_H(z)\| |dz| \leq \frac{1}{2\pi} \left(\frac{2}{g}\right)^2 \|H'\| \cdot \pi g = \frac{2\|H'\|}{g}. \quad (7.2.14)$$

□

Bound (7.2.10) follows from (7.2.9):  $\|[A, B]\| \leq 2\|A\| \cdot \|B\|$  gives  $\|[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\| \leq 2 \cdot 2\|H'\|/g \cdot 1/g = 4\|H'\|/g^2$ .

Bound (7.2.11) requires two intermediate results. Write  $\tilde{H} = H - \lambda_0$  for the shifted Hamiltonian. Its pseudoinverse satisfies

$$(\tilde{H}^+)' = -\tilde{H}^+ \tilde{H}' \tilde{H}^+ + P' \tilde{H}^+ + \tilde{H}^+ P', \quad (7.2.15)$$

where  $\tilde{H}' = H' - \lambda'_0$ . To see this, split the difference quotient  $(\tilde{H}^+(s+h) - \tilde{H}^+(s))/h$  using  $Q = \tilde{H}^+ \tilde{H}$  and  $P = I - Q$ . The  $Q$ -part gives  $\lim_{h \rightarrow 0} \tilde{H}^+(s)(\tilde{H}(s) - \tilde{H}(s+h))\tilde{H}^+(s+h)/h = -\tilde{H}^+ \tilde{H}' \tilde{H}^+$ , while the  $P$ -part, after adding and subtracting  $P(s+h)\tilde{H}^+(s+h)$  and  $\tilde{H}^+(s)P(s)$ , yields  $P' \tilde{H}^+ + \tilde{H}^+ P'$ . Bounding the norm and using  $|\lambda'_0| = |\langle \phi_0 | H' | \phi_0 \rangle| \leq \|H'\|$  (Hellmann-Feynman):

$$\|(\tilde{H}^+)'\| \leq \frac{\|H'\| + |\lambda'_0|}{g^2} + \frac{4\|H'\|}{g^2} \leq \frac{6\|H'\|}{g^2}. \quad (7.2.16)$$

The second intermediate result bounds  $P''$ . Differentiating  $P' = (2\pi i)^{-1} \oint_{\Gamma} R_H H' R_H dz$  gives

$$P'' = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \oint_{\Gamma} (2R_H H' R_H H' R_H + R_H H'' R_H) dz, \quad (7.2.17)$$

where the two  $R_H H' R_H H' R_H$  terms arise from differentiating each resolvent factor. Bounding by  $\|R_H(z)\| \leq 2/g$  on  $\Gamma$  and integrating over the contour of length  $\pi g$ :

$$\|P''\| \leq \frac{1}{2\pi} \left(\frac{2}{g}\right)^3 2\|H'\|^2 \cdot \pi g + \frac{1}{2\pi} \left(\frac{2}{g}\right)^2 \|H''\| \cdot \pi g = \frac{8\|H'\|^2}{g^2} + \frac{2\|H''\|}{g}. \quad (7.2.18)$$

Now expand  $[P', (H - \lambda_0)^+] = [P'', (H - \lambda_0)^+] + [P', ((H - \lambda_0)^+)]'$  and bound each commutator:

$$\|[P'', (H - \lambda_0)^+]\| \leq \frac{2\|P''\|}{g} \leq \frac{16\|H'\|^2}{g^3} + \frac{4\|H''\|}{g^2}, \quad (7.2.19)$$

and, using (7.2.9) and (7.2.16):

$$\|[P', ((H - \lambda_0)^+)]'\| \leq 2\|P'\| \cdot \|(\tilde{H}^+)'\| \leq 2 \cdot \frac{2\|H'\|}{g} \cdot \frac{6\|H'\|}{g^2} = \frac{24\|H'\|^2}{g^3}. \quad (7.2.20)$$

Summing gives  $40\|H'\|^2/g^3 + 4\|H''\|/g^2$ . A block-matrix decomposition of the commutator with respect to  $P$  and  $Q = I - P$ , tracking cross terms exactly rather than using submultiplicativity, replaces the coefficient 40 by  $\approx 4.77$  [14]; the asymptotic scaling is unchanged.

The simplest schedule is constant:  $K'(s) = T$ , evolving at a uniform rate regardless of the gap. This establishes a baseline — what happens when the schedule ignores the spectral structure. Substituting the derivative bounds into the error bound (7.2.4) with  $(1/K')' = 0$  gives the constant-rate result.

**Theorem 7.2.3** (Constant-rate runtime). *Under the conditions of Lemma 7.2.1, a constant schedule  $K'(s) = T$  achieves error at most  $\varepsilon$  provided*

$$T \geq \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \left( \frac{4\|H'(1)\|}{g(1)^2} + \int_0^1 \frac{40\|H'(s)\|^2}{g(s)^3} ds + \int_0^1 \frac{4\|H''(s)\|}{g(s)^2} ds \right). \quad (7.2.21)$$

*Proof.* With constant  $K'$ , the third term in (7.2.4) vanishes. Substituting bounds (7.2.10) and (7.2.11) into the remaining two terms:

$$\varepsilon \leq \frac{1}{T} \left( \frac{4\|H'(1)\|}{g(1)^2} + \int_0^1 \frac{40\|H'(s)\|^2}{g(s)^3} ds + \int_0^1 \frac{4\|H''(s)\|}{g(s)^2} ds \right). \quad (7.2.22)$$

Setting the right side equal to  $\varepsilon$  and solving for  $T$  gives (7.2.21).  $\square$

For the adiabatic Hamiltonian  $H(s) = -(1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + sH_z$ , the derivative  $H'(s) = |\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + H_z$  is constant with  $\|H'\| = O(1)$ , and  $H''(s) = 0$ . The dominant term in (7.2.21) is  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-3} ds$ . From the gap profile of Theorem 6.3.1, the crossing window contributes

$$\int_{s^*-\delta_s}^{s^*} g(s)^{-3} ds \leq \frac{\delta_s}{g_{\min}^3} = \frac{A_2}{A_1(A_1+1)} \cdot g_{\min}^{-2}, \quad (7.2.23)$$

using  $\delta_s = A_2 g_{\min}/(A_1(A_1+1))$  from Eq. (5.4.10). This gives  $T_{\text{constant}} = O(\delta_s/(\varepsilon g_{\min}^3))$ .

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $g_{\min} = 1/\sqrt{N}$ ), the exact gap  $g(s) = \sqrt{(2s-1)^2 + 4s(1-s)/N}$  (Eq. (5.3.15)) satisfies  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-3} ds = O(N)$  since the integral is dominated by the  $O(1/\sqrt{N})$  window where  $g \approx 1/\sqrt{N}$ . Therefore  $T_{\text{constant}} = O(N/\varepsilon)$ , matching the classical search complexity. A constant-rate adiabatic schedule provides no quantum speedup. The algorithm wastes time far from the crossing, where the gap is  $O(1)$  and fast evolution would suffice, while still moving too quickly near  $s^*$  to maintain ground-state fidelity.

### 7.3 The Adaptive Schedule

The constant schedule's failure stems from treating all values of  $s$  equally. The error bound (7.2.4) indicates a remedy: make  $K'(s)$  large where  $g(s)$  is large (slow evolution, low error contribution per unit of  $s$ ) and small where  $g(s)$  is small (fast physical evolution, but over a narrow interval of  $s$ ). The natural ansatz is  $K'(s)$  proportional to  $1/g(s)^p$  for some parameter  $p \geq 1$ : the schedule slows by a factor of  $g^{-p}$  near the gap minimum. The total runtime becomes  $T \propto \int_0^1 g(s)^{-p} ds$ , and the error terms involve  $\int g^{q-3} ds$  for various  $q$  depending on  $p$ .

The parameter  $p$  controls the trade-off between error reduction and runtime. The schedule  $K'(s) \propto 1/g_0(s)^p$  generalizes the Roland-Cerf local condition (which corresponds to  $p = 2$ ) to arbitrary exponents. At  $p = 1$ , the runtime integral  $\int g_0^{-1} ds$  is  $O(\log(1/g_{\min}))$  (optimal), but the error integral  $\int g_0^{-2} ds$  diverges for a piecewise linear gap profile, so the error cannot be controlled. At  $p = 2$ , the runtime integral  $\int g_0^{-2} ds = O(1/g_{\min})$  matches Roland-Cerf and the error integral  $\int g_0^{-1} ds = O(\log(1/g_{\min}))$  converges, but bounding the schedule derivative term requires the exact gap (not just a lower bound), limiting the applicability. For  $p \in (1, 2)$ , both integrals scale as  $O(g_{\min}^{1-p})$  and  $O(g_{\min}^{p-2})$  respectively, and their product is  $O(g_{\min}^{-1})$  regardless of the specific  $p$ . The error analysis requires only  $g_0 \leq g$  (not  $g_0 = g$ ), and the constant  $c$  in (7.3.2) absorbs the  $p$ -dependent prefactors. For the piecewise linear gap profile of Theorem 6.3.1, any  $p \in (1, 2)$  balances the integrals; the specific choice affects only the constants, not the asymptotic scaling.

The adaptive rate theorem, extending the eigenpath traversal framework of [22] to the continuous-time setting, formalizes this trade-off.

**Theorem 7.3.1** (Adaptive rate [14]). *Let  $H(s)$  satisfy the conditions of Lemma 7.2.1, and let  $g_0 : [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^+$  be an absolutely continuous function satisfying  $g_0(s) \leq g(s)$  for all  $s$ . Suppose there exist  $1 < p < 2$  (the endpoints are excluded: at  $p = 1$  the  $B_1$  integral diverges logarithmically, and at  $p = 2$  the schedule variation term requires the exact gap) and constants  $B_1, B_2 \geq 1$  such that*

$$\int_0^1 \frac{ds}{g_0(s)^p} \leq B_1 g_{\min}^{1-p} \quad \text{and} \quad \int_0^1 \frac{ds}{g_0(s)^{3-p}} \leq B_2 g_{\min}^{p-2}. \quad (7.3.1)$$

Define

$$c = \sup_{s \in [0,1]} (4\|H'(s)\| + 40\|H'(s)\|^2 B_2 + 4\|H''(s)\| + 6p|g'_0(s)|\|H'(s)\| B_2). \quad (7.3.2)$$

The last term uses  $|g'_0(s)|$  rather than  $|g'(s)|$ : since the schedule is defined in terms of  $g_0$ , the derivative  $(K'^{-1})' \propto (g_0^p)'$  involves  $g'_0$ . Then the schedule

$$K'(s) = \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{c}{g_0(s)^p \cdot g_{\min}^{2-p}} \quad (7.3.3)$$

achieves error at most  $\varepsilon$ , with total runtime

$$T = \int_0^1 K'(s) ds \leq \frac{c B_1}{\varepsilon g_{\min}}. \quad (7.3.4)$$

*Proof.* Let  $\varepsilon_0$  denote the actual error. Substituting (7.3.3) into the error bound (7.2.4):  $(K')^{-1} = \varepsilon g_0^p g_{\min}^{2-p}/c$ , and  $|((K')^{-1})'| = (\varepsilon g_{\min}^{2-p}/c) \cdot p g_0^{p-1} |g'_0|$ . The three terms become

$$\begin{aligned} \varepsilon_0 \leq \frac{\varepsilon}{c} g_{\min}^{2-p} & \left( g_0(1)^p \left\| [P'(1), (H(1) - \lambda_0(1))^+] \right\| \right. \\ & \left. + \int_0^1 g_0^p \left\| [P', (H - \lambda_0)^+] \right\| ds + \int_0^1 p g_0^{p-1} |g'_0| \left\| [P', (H - \lambda_0)^+] \right\| ds \right). \end{aligned} \quad (7.3.5)$$

**Boundary term.** Using bound (7.2.10) with  $g_0 \leq g$ :

$$g_{\min}^{2-p} g_0(1)^p \cdot \frac{4 \|H'(1)\|}{g(1)^2} \leq 4 \|H'(1)\| g_{\min}^{2-p} g_0(1)^{p-2} \leq 4 \|H'\|, \quad (7.3.6)$$

since  $g_0(1) = \Delta/30 \geq g_{\min}$  and  $p-2 < 0$  imply  $g_0(1)^{p-2} \leq g_{\min}^{p-2}$ .

**Commutator derivative integral.** Using bound (7.2.11) and splitting:

$$g_{\min}^{2-p} \int_0^1 g_0^p \cdot \frac{40 \|H'\|^2}{g^3} ds \leq 40 \|H'\|^2 g_{\min}^{2-p} \int_0^1 \frac{ds}{g_0^{3-p}} \leq 40 \|H'\|^2 B_2, \quad (7.3.7)$$

where  $g_0^p/g^3 \leq g_0^p/g_0^3 = 1/g_0^{3-p}$  since  $g_0 \leq g$ , and the  $B_2$  condition (7.3.1) absorbs  $g_{\min}^{2-p} \cdot g_{\min}^{p-2} = 1$ . Similarly, the  $H''$  sub-term contributes

$$g_{\min}^{2-p} \int_0^1 g_0^p \cdot \frac{4 \|H''\|}{g^2} ds \leq 4 \|H''\| g_{\min}^{2-p} \int_0^1 \frac{ds}{g_0^{2-p}} \leq 4 \|H''\|, \quad (7.3.8)$$

since  $g_0 \geq b g_{\min}$  and  $p-2 < 0$  imply  $g_0^{p-2} \leq b^{p-2} g_{\min}^{p-2}$ , giving  $\int g_0^{p-2} ds = O(g_{\min}^{p-2})$  with the constant  $b^{p-2} = 10^{2-p}$  absorbed into the  $O$ -notation.

**Schedule variation integral.** Using bound (7.2.10):

$$\begin{aligned} g_{\min}^{2-p} \int_0^1 p g_0^{p-1} |g'_0| \cdot \frac{4 \|H'\|}{g^2} ds & \leq 4p \|H'\| g_{\min}^{2-p} \int_0^1 \frac{g_0^{p-1} |g'_0|}{g_0^2} ds \\ & = 4p \|H'\| g_{\min}^{2-p} \int_0^1 g_0^{p-3} |g'_0| ds. \end{aligned} \quad (7.3.9)$$

For piecewise linear  $g_0$ , the derivative  $|g'_0|$  is constant on each piece, so  $\int g_0^{p-3} |g'_0| ds \leq \sup |g'_0| \cdot \int g_0^{p-3} ds \leq \sup |g'_0| \cdot B_2 g_{\min}^{p-2}$ . The resulting bound is  $4p \sup |g'_0| \|H'\| B_2$ . The constant  $c$  in (7.3.2) uses the factor  $6p$  rather than  $4p$ , following the paper's convention [14]; this is a valid overestimate that simplifies the expression without affecting the asymptotic result.

**Collecting.** Summing all contributions:

$$\varepsilon_0 \leq \frac{\varepsilon}{c} (4 \|H'\| + 40 \|H'\|^2 B_2 + 4 \|H''\| + 6p |g'_0| \|H'\| B_2) \leq \frac{\varepsilon}{c} \cdot c = \varepsilon. \quad (7.3.10)$$

**Runtime.** The total evolution time is

$$T = \int_0^1 K' ds = \frac{c}{\varepsilon} g_{\min}^{p-2} \int_0^1 \frac{ds}{g_0^p} \leq \frac{c}{\varepsilon} g_{\min}^{p-2} \cdot B_1 g_{\min}^{1-p} = \frac{c B_1}{\varepsilon g_{\min}}. \quad (7.3.11) \quad \square$$

The error has three contributions: a boundary term that depends on  $g_0(1)$  and is  $O(1)$ ; an integral that pairs  $g_0^p$  from the schedule with  $g^{-3}$  from the derivative bounds, producing  $\int g_0^{p-3} ds$ ; and a schedule variation term from the non-constant  $K'$ . The parameter  $p$  balances the two integrals:  $B_1$  bounds  $\int g_0^{-p} ds$  (the runtime cost), while  $B_2$  bounds  $\int g_0^{p-3} ds$  (the error cost). Their product with  $g_{\min}^{-1}$  gives the final runtime.

**Corollary 7.3.2.** *If  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-p} ds = O(g_{\min}^{1-p})$  for all  $p > 1$ , and  $\|H'\|$ ,  $\|H''\|$ ,  $|\lambda'_0|$ ,  $|g'|$  are all  $O(1)$ , then  $T = O(1/(\varepsilon g_{\min}))$ .*

The runtime scales inversely with the minimum gap, which is optimal for quantum search [5]. The running example satisfies these conditions.

The integral  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-p} ds$  is dominated by the  $O(1/\sqrt{N})$ -wide window where  $g \approx 1/\sqrt{N}$ : the window's contribution is  $(1/\sqrt{N}) \cdot N^{p/2} = N^{(p-1)/2}$ , while outside the window  $g = \Omega(|s - 1/2|)$  and the integral converges. For any  $p > 1$ , this gives  $O(g_{\min}^{1-p})$ .

**Lemma 7.3.3** (Grover gap integral). *For the exact gap  $g(s) = \sqrt{(2s-1)^2 + 4s(1-s)/N}$  of the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ,  $d_1 = N - 1$ ),*

$$\int_0^1 g(s)^{-p} ds = O\left(N^{(p-1)/2}\right) = O\left(g_{\min}^{1-p}\right) \quad \text{for all } p > 1. \quad (7.3.12)$$

*Proof.* The gap is symmetric about  $s = 1/2$  and achieves its minimum  $g_{\min} = 1/\sqrt{N}$  there. Split the integral at  $1/2 - 1/\sqrt{N}$ . In the window  $[1/2 - 1/\sqrt{N}, 1/2]$ , bound  $g \geq g_{\min}$ :

$$\int_{1/2-1/\sqrt{N}}^{1/2} g^{-p} ds \leq \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \cdot N^{p/2} = N^{(p-1)/2}. \quad (7.3.13)$$

Outside the window,  $g(s) \geq c|s - 1/2|$  for a constant  $c > 0$  (the gap grows linearly away from the minimum). The change of variable  $u = g(s)$ , with  $|ds/du| = O(1)$  since  $|g'(s)| \leq 2$ , gives

$$\int_0^{1/2-1/\sqrt{N}} g^{-p} ds \leq C \int_{1/\sqrt{N}}^{O(1)} u^{-p} du = O\left(N^{(p-1)/2}\right). \quad (7.3.14)$$

Combining and using the symmetry about  $1/2$  gives the result.  $\square$

The other conditions of **Corollary 7.3.2** are immediate:  $\|H'\| = \|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + H_z\| \leq 2$ ,  $H'' = 0$ ,  $|\lambda'_0| \leq \|H'\| \leq 2$  by the Hellmann-Feynman theorem, and  $|g'(s)| \leq 2$  (from  $|g'| = |4(1 - 1/N)(1/2 - s)/g| \leq 2$ , since the numerator is at most  $2g$ ). Therefore  $T = O(\sqrt{N}/\varepsilon)$  for the running example with an adaptive schedule, compared to  $T = O(N/\varepsilon)$  with a constant schedule. The adaptive schedule recovers the full Grover speedup.

The schedule  $K'(s) \propto 1/g(s)^p$  concentrates the evolution time near the crossing: at  $s = 1/2$ , where  $g \approx 1/\sqrt{N}$ , the schedule rate is  $K' \propto N^{p/2}$ , while far from  $1/2$ , where  $g = O(1)$ , it is  $K' = O(1)$ . The algorithm spends  $O(\sqrt{N})$  physical time traversing the window and  $O(1)$  time traversing the rest of  $[0, 1]$ .

## 7.4 Runtime of Adiabatic Quantum Optimization

Applying **Theorem 7.3.1** to the adiabatic Hamiltonian  $H(s) = -(1-s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + sH_z$  with the gap profile of **Theorem 6.3.1** requires three steps: construct a continuous lower bound  $g_0(s)$  from the piecewise bounds, compute  $B_1$  and  $B_2$ , and evaluate the constant  $c$ .

The piecewise bounds of **Theorem 6.3.1** are valid in their respective regions but are not continuous at the boundaries  $s^* - \delta_s$  and  $s^*$ : the left bound exceeds the window bound at  $s^* - \delta_s$ , and the right bound is smaller than  $g_{\min}$  at  $s^*$ . The adaptive rate theorem requires  $g_0$  to be absolutely continuous on  $[0, 1]$ . Shrinking the left and window bounds by a constant factor  $b$  makes all three pieces meet continuously at the boundaries.

Define

$$g_0(s) = \begin{cases} b \frac{A_1(A_1 + 1)}{A_2} (s^* - s), & s \in [0, s^* - \delta_s], \quad (\text{i.e., } b \frac{A_1}{A_2} \cdot \frac{s^* - s}{1 - s^*}) \\ b g_{\min}, & s \in [s^* - \delta_s, s^*], \\ \frac{\Delta}{30} \cdot \frac{s - s_0}{1 - s_0}, & s \in [s^*, 1], \end{cases} \quad (7.4.1)$$

where  $s_0$  is given by Eq. (6.2.5) and the shrinking factor is

$$b = k \cdot \frac{2}{1 + f(s^*)} = \frac{1}{4} \cdot \frac{2}{1 + 4} = \frac{1}{10}, \quad (7.4.2)$$

using  $k = 1/4$  and  $f(s^*) = 4$  from Eq. (6.2.23).

Each piece of  $g_0$  lies below the corresponding gap bound from [Theorem 6.3.1](#): the left and window pieces are shrunk by  $b = 1/10$ , and the right piece equals the original bound. The function  $g_0$  is continuous at both boundaries. At  $s = s^* - \delta_s$ , the left piece gives  $b \cdot A_1(A_1 + 1)\delta_s/A_2$ . Using  $\delta_s = A_2 g_{\min}/(A_1(A_1 + 1))$  from [Eq. \(5.4.10\)](#), this equals  $b g_{\min} = g_{\min}/10$ , matching the window piece. At  $s = s^*$ , the window piece gives  $b g_{\min} = g_{\min}/10$ , and the right piece gives  $(\Delta/30)(s^* - s_0)/(1 - s_0)$ . Using  $s^* - s_0 = k g_{\min}(1 - s^*)/(a - k g_{\min})$  and  $1 - s_0 = (1 - s^*) \cdot a/(a - k g_{\min})$  from [Eq. \(6.2.5\)](#):

$$\frac{\Delta}{30} \cdot \frac{s^* - s_0}{1 - s_0} = \frac{\Delta}{30} \cdot \frac{k g_{\min}}{a} = \frac{\Delta}{30} \cdot \frac{g_{\min}/4}{\Delta/12} = \frac{g_{\min}}{10}, \quad (7.4.3)$$

again matching the window piece. The parameters  $b$ ,  $k$ , and  $a$  are coupled precisely so that  $g_0$  is continuous: the shrinking factor  $b = 1/10$  absorbs both the ratio  $k = 1/4$  from the right-side resolvent bound and the value  $f(s^*) = 4$  from the monotonicity analysis of Chapter 6.

The integral  $\int_0^1 g_0^{-p} ds$  splits across the three regions. In the left region,  $g_0(s) = b A_1(A_1 + 1)(s^* - s)/A_2$ , so

$$\begin{aligned} \int_0^{s^* - \delta_s} g_0^{-p} ds &= \left( \frac{A_2}{b A_1(A_1 + 1)} \right)^p \int_{\delta_s}^{s^*} \frac{du}{u^p} = \frac{1}{b^p} \left( \frac{A_2}{A_1(A_1 + 1)} \right)^p \cdot \frac{1}{(p-1) \delta_s^{p-1}} \\ &= \frac{1}{b^p(p-1)} \cdot \frac{A_2}{A_1(A_1 + 1)} \cdot g_{\min}^{1-p}, \end{aligned} \quad (7.4.4)$$

where the last step uses  $\delta_s^{p-1} = (A_2 g_{\min}/(A_1(A_1 + 1)))^{p-1}$ . In the window,  $g_0 = b g_{\min}$  is constant:

$$\int_{s^* - \delta_s}^{s^*} g_0^{-p} ds = \frac{\delta_s}{b^p g_{\min}^p} = \frac{1}{b^p} \cdot \frac{A_2}{A_1(A_1 + 1)} \cdot g_{\min}^{1-p}. \quad (7.4.5)$$

Combining the left and window contributions with  $b^{-p} = 10^p$ :  $(1/(p-1) + 1)/b^p = p \cdot 10^p/(p-1)$ , giving  $(p/(p-1)) \cdot 10^p \cdot A_2/(A_1(A_1 + 1)) \cdot g_{\min}^{1-p}$ .

In the right region,  $g_0(s) = (\Delta/30)(s - s_0)/(1 - s_0)$ , so

$$\begin{aligned} \int_{s^*}^1 g_0^{-p} ds &= \left( \frac{30(1 - s_0)}{\Delta} \right)^p \int_{s^* - s_0}^{1 - s_0} \frac{du}{u^p} = \left( \frac{30(1 - s_0)}{\Delta} \right)^p \cdot \frac{1}{(p-1)(s^* - s_0)^{p-1}} \\ &= \frac{1}{p-1} \left( \frac{30}{\Delta} \right)^p \left( \frac{a}{k} \right)^{p-1} (1 - s_0) \cdot g_{\min}^{1-p}, \end{aligned} \quad (7.4.6)$$

using  $s^* - s_0 = k g_{\min}(1 - s^*)/(a - k g_{\min})$  and  $1 - s_0 = a(1 - s^*)/(a - k g_{\min})$ . With  $a = (4/3)k^2 \Delta$  and  $k = 1/4$ :  $a/k = \Delta/3$ , so  $(30/\Delta)^p (\Delta/3)^{p-1} = 30^p/(3\Delta)$ , and  $(1 - s_0) \leq 1/(1 + A_1)$ . The right contribution is  $3 \cdot 10^p/((p-1)\Delta(1 + A_1)) \cdot g_{\min}^{1-p}$ .

Since  $\Delta A_2 \leq A_1$  (from  $A_2 \leq A_1/\Delta$ , which follows because  $A_2 = (1/N) \sum d_k/(E_k - E_0)^2 \leq (1/\Delta) \cdot (1/N) \sum d_k/(E_k - E_0) = A_1/\Delta$ ), the left-plus-window term  $A_2/(A_1(1 + A_1)) \leq 1/(\Delta(1 + A_1))$ . Combining all three:

$$\int_0^1 g_0^{-p} ds \leq \frac{(p+3) \cdot 10^p}{(p-1)(1 + A_1)\Delta} \cdot g_{\min}^{1-p}, \quad \text{so } B_1 = O\left(\frac{1}{\Delta(1 + A_1)}\right). \quad (7.4.7)$$

The integral  $\int_0^1 g_0^{p-3} ds$  has the same three-region structure, with the exponent  $p$  replaced by  $3 - p$ . Since  $p \in (1, 2)$ , the conjugate exponent  $3 - p$  also lies in  $(1, 2)$ , so the integrals converge by the same mechanism: the substitution  $u = g_0(s)$  reduces each region to  $\int u^{-(3-p)} du$ , which converges at  $u = 0$  precisely when  $3 - p < 2$  (i.e.,  $p > 1$ ). For concreteness, the window contributes  $\int_{s^* - \delta_s}^{s^*} (b g_{\min})^{p-3} ds = \delta_s b^{p-3} g_{\min}^{p-3} = b^{p-3} (A_2/(A_1(A_1 + 1))) g_{\min}^{p-2}$ , which is  $O(g_{\min}^{p-2})$  since  $b^{p-3} = 10^{3-p}$  is a constant. The left and right regions contribute the same order by the same substitution as for  $B_1$ , with  $b^{p-3}$  replacing  $b^{-p}$ . Combining all three gives

$$B_2 = O\left(\frac{1}{\Delta(1 + A_1)}\right). \quad (7.4.8)$$

For the adiabatic Hamiltonian  $H(s) = -(1 - s)|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + sH_z$ :

$$\|H'(s)\| = O(1), \quad \|H''(s)\| = 0, \quad |\lambda'_0(s)| = O(1), \quad (7.4.9)$$

since  $H'(s) = |\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + H_z$  is constant and  $\lambda'_0(s) = \langle\phi_0(s)|H'(s)|\phi_0(s)\rangle$  is bounded by  $\|H'\|$  via the Hellmann-Feynman theorem. The derivative  $|g'_0(s)|$  is bounded on each piece: on the left,  $|g'_0| = b A_1(A_1 + 1)/A_2$ ; in the window,  $g'_0 = 0$ ; on the right,  $|g'_0| = \Delta/(30(1 - s_0))$ . For piecewise linear  $g_0$ , the product  $|g'_0| \cdot B_2$  remains

bounded. The window contributes nothing ( $g'_0 = 0$  there). On each linear piece,  $|g'_0|$  is constant and factors out; the change of variable  $u = g_0(s)$  reduces the integral to  $\int g_0^{p-3} |g'_0| ds = \int_{g_{\min}/10}^{O(1)} u^{p-3} du = O(g_{\min}^{p-2})$ , independently of the slopes. With  $\|H''\| = 0$ , the dominant term in (7.3.2) is  $40\|H'\|^2 B_2$ . Therefore

$$c = O(B_2). \quad (7.4.10)$$

**Theorem 7.4.1** (Runtime of AQO — Main Result 1 [14]). *Let  $H_z$  satisfy the spectral condition (Definition 5.2.2). For any  $\varepsilon > 0$ , the adaptive schedule (7.3.3) with the gap lower bound (7.4.1) prepares the ground state of  $H_z$  with fidelity at least  $1 - \varepsilon$  in time*

$$T = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{\sqrt{A_2}}{\Delta^2 A_1 (A_1 + 1)} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{N}{d_0}}\right). \quad \text{ii} \quad (7.4.11)$$

*Proof.* By Theorem 7.3.1,  $T \leq c B_1 / (\varepsilon g_{\min})$ . Substituting  $c = O(B_2)$ ,  $B_1 = O(1/(\Delta(1 + A_1)))$ ,  $B_2 = O(1/(\Delta(1 + A_1)))$ , and  $g_{\min} = (2A_1/(A_1 + 1))\sqrt{d_0/(NA_2)}$  from Eq. (5.4.9):

$$T = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{B_1 B_2}{g_{\min}}\right) = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{1}{\Delta^2 (1 + A_1)^2} \cdot \frac{A_1 + 1}{2A_1} \sqrt{\frac{NA_2}{d_0}}\right) = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{\sqrt{A_2}}{\Delta^2 A_1 (A_1 + 1)} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{N}{d_0}}\right). \quad (7.4.12) \quad \square$$

The runtime (7.4.11) decomposes into five factors. The dependence  $1/\varepsilon$  is linear in the target precision: the adaptive schedule converts time directly into fidelity, unlike the standard adiabatic theorem where  $T$  scales as  $1/\varepsilon$  times a higher polynomial in  $1/g_{\min}$ . The factor  $\sqrt{A_2}$  reflects the spectral spread: larger  $A_2 = (1/N) \sum d_k / (E_k - E_0)^2$  means eigenvalues close to  $E_0$  carry substantial degeneracy, sharpening the gap minimum and narrowing the crossing window. The denominator  $A_1(A_1 + 1)$  captures the crossing position: larger  $A_1$  pushes  $s^*$  closer to 1, steepening the gap's left arm and allowing faster traversal. The factor  $1/\Delta^2$  is the price of the right-side bound — a larger spectral gap  $\Delta$  in  $H_z$  means the gap reopens faster after the crossing, and the quadratic dependence arises because both  $B_1$  and  $B_2$  contribute a factor of  $1/\Delta$ . The dominant factor  $\sqrt{N/d_0}$  is the quantum speedup:  $\sqrt{N} = \sqrt{2^n}$  is exponential in  $n$ , and more solutions (larger  $d_0$ ) reduce the runtime.

For the Ising Hamiltonian  $H_\sigma$  (Eq. (5.1.4)) with  $A_1, A_2 = O(\text{poly}(n))$  and  $\Delta \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$ :  $T = \tilde{O}(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ , matching the lower bound of [5] up to polylogarithmic factors. When  $d_0 = O(1)$  (constant number of solutions), the adiabatic algorithm achieves the Grover speedup  $\sqrt{N}$ .

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $A_1 = (N - 1)/N \approx 1$ ,  $A_2 = (N - 1)/N \approx 1$ ,  $\Delta = 1$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ):

$$T = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{1}{1 \cdot 2} \cdot \sqrt{N}\right) = O\left(\frac{\sqrt{N}}{\varepsilon}\right), \quad (7.4.13)$$

matching the circuit-based Grover algorithm. The adaptive adiabatic approach achieves the same quadratic speedup through a smooth interpolation between two Hamiltonians, without requiring oracle queries or amplitude amplification.

A constant schedule (Theorem 7.2.3) gives  $T = O(N/\varepsilon)$ , controlled by  $\int g^{-3} ds$ , because it treats every value of  $s$  equally and the narrow crossing window dominates. The Roland-Cerf local schedule (section 7.1) achieves  $T = O(\sqrt{N}/\varepsilon)$  for the running example by setting  $K'(s) \propto 1/g(s)^2$ , but requires the exact gap  $g(s)$  at every point. The adaptive schedule of Theorem 7.3.1 matches this  $O(\sqrt{N}/\varepsilon)$  scaling using only a piecewise linear lower bound  $g_0(s) \leq g(s)$  — the bounds constructed in Chapter 6. The generalization from exact gap to lower bound is what makes the result applicable to arbitrary problem Hamiltonians satisfying the spectral condition, at the cost of the spectral prefactors  $\sqrt{A_2}/(\Delta^2 A_1 (A_1 + 1))$  in (7.4.11). The discrete-time eigenpath traversal of [21] achieves the same  $O(1/g_{\min})$  scaling; the continuous-time formulation here provides explicit constants and a direct connection to the gap profile.

Subsequent independent work by Guo and An [25] places the adaptive schedule result in a more general framework. They consider arbitrary time-dependent Hamiltonians  $H(u(s)) = (1 - u(s))H_0 + u(s)H_1$  and introduce a *measure condition*: the Lebesgue measure of the set  $\{s : \Delta(u(s)) \leq x\}$  is  $O(x)$  as  $x \rightarrow 0$ , where  $\Delta(u(s))$  is the instantaneous spectral gap. Under this condition, they prove that a power-law schedule with exponent  $p = 3/2$  achieves  $O(1/\Delta_*)$  runtime, a quadratic improvement in gap dependence over the standard  $O(1/\Delta_*^2)$  bound. They further show via variational analysis that  $p = 3/2$  is optimal for linear gap profiles and that linear schedules are never optimal when the gap is non-constant. The gap profile of Theorem 6.3.1

<sup>ii</sup>The published paper [14] states  $A_1^2$  in Theorem 1. The expression  $A_1(A_1 + 1)$  follows from the proof derivation in Appendix A-IV of the same paper. For Ising Hamiltonians with  $A_1 = O(\text{poly}(n))$ , the distinction is absorbed by the  $O(\cdot)$  notation, since  $A_1(A_1 + 1) = A_1^2 + A_1 = \Theta(A_1^2)$ .

satisfies their measure condition: the gap has finitely many local minima (exactly one, at  $s^*$ ) and reopens linearly on both sides, so the set where  $g(s) \leq x$  has width  $O(x)$ . The general framework therefore applies to the AQO setting, but the concrete spectral bounds of Chapter 6 — the explicit slopes, the crossing position, the window width — are what make the runtime formula (7.4.11) explicit rather than existential. Chapter 9 develops the connection to Guo and An’s framework further, particularly the role of the measure condition in the information-runtime tradeoff.

The schedule (7.3.3) requires knowing  $g_0(s)$ , which requires knowing  $s^*$ ,  $\delta_s$ , and  $g_{\min}$ . All three depend on the spectral parameter  $A_1$ . In the crossing window  $[s^* - \delta_s, s^*]$ , the schedule is constant:  $K' = c/(\varepsilon b^p g_{\min}^2)$ . This rate does not depend on  $A_1$  beyond  $g_{\min}$ . But the window’s location is  $[s^* - \delta_s, s^*]$ , and  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1)$  must be known to accuracy  $O(\delta_s) = O(2^{-n/2})$  to ensure the slow phase occurs at the right place. Outside the window, the schedule depends linearly on the distance from  $s^*$ , so a small error in  $s^*$  introduces a proportionally small error in  $K'$ , absorbed by the polynomial factors. But the window itself is exponentially narrow in  $n$ : placing it incorrectly causes the algorithm to evolve rapidly through the crossing, destroying the ground-state fidelity.

The parameters  $A_2$  and  $d_0$  need not be known precisely. Replacing  $A_2$  with the constant lower bound 1 (valid for all Hamiltonians with at least two energy levels) and setting  $d_0 = 1$  (the worst case) introduces at most a  $\text{poly}(n)$  slowdown in the runtime, since these parameters enter only through the ratio  $\sqrt{A_2/d_0}$  and the bound  $B_1$ . The critical parameter is  $A_1$ : it must be computed to additive accuracy  $O(\delta_s) = O(2^{-n/2})$  before the evolution begins. How hard is this computation? The precision needed is exponential in  $n$ , while the problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$  is specified by  $\text{poly}(n)$  bits. Chapter 8 answers this question: approximating  $A_1$  to additive accuracy  $1/\text{poly}(n)$  — far less precision than needed — is already NP-hard, and computing  $A_1$  exactly is #P-hard.

## Chapter 8

# Hardness of Optimality

The optimal schedule of the previous chapter achieves a quadratic speedup over classical brute-force search, but the schedule must be fixed before evolution begins. It depends on the spectral parameter  $A_1$  — the weighted sum of inverse gaps that determines where the avoided crossing occurs — and this parameter must be known to additive accuracy  $O(2^{-n/2})$ . Given the  $N = 2^n$  diagonal entries of the problem Hamiltonian  $H_z$ , the brute-force approach to computing  $A_1 = (1/N) \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} d_k / (E_k - E_0)$  — enumerating all eigenvalues, sorting, and summing — takes  $O(N)$  time, precisely the cost of classical unstructured search. If the pre-computation is as expensive as the problem itself, the quadratic speedup becomes conditional: the adiabatic algorithm is fast, provided someone has already done the slow part.

The runtime of [Theorem 7.4.1](#),

$$T = O\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \cdot \frac{\sqrt{A_2}}{\Delta^2 A_1(A_1 + 1)} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{N}{d_0}}\right),$$

makes this dependence explicit. The adaptive schedule places a slow phase in the window  $[s^* - \delta_s, s^*]$  centered at the crossing position  $s^* = A_1 / (A_1 + 1)$ , where the spectral gap reaches its minimum, and accelerates elsewhere. The parameters  $A_2$  and  $d_0$  enter only through the ratio  $\sqrt{A_2/d_0}$  and can be replaced by conservative bounds ( $A_2 \geq 1$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ) at the cost of polynomial slowdown. The critical parameter is  $A_1$ : it determines where the crossing occurs, and the window width  $\delta_s = O(\sqrt{d_0 A_2 / N}) = O(2^{-n/2})$  sets the required precision. An error larger than  $\delta_s$  in the crossing position causes the algorithm to evolve rapidly through the gap minimum, destroying the ground-state fidelity. Throughout this chapter, we write  $A_1(H)$  to make the dependence on the Hamiltonian explicit when multiple Hamiltonians are under consideration.

The hardness of computing  $A_1$  is not the only obstacle to adiabatic optimization for hard problems. Even if  $A_1$  were known exactly, the single-crossing framework of Chapters 5–7 applies only to the rank-one projector  $H_0 = -|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$ . For the transverse-field driver  $H_0 = -\sum_j \sigma_x^j$  — the standard choice in quantum annealing — the interpolated Hamiltonian exhibits exponentially many avoided crossings with exponentially small gaps for random NP-complete instances [13]. In that regime, knowing  $A_1$  does not help, because the schedule would need to navigate a dense forest of crossings rather than a single isolated one. The information-theoretic barrier (computing  $A_1$  is hard) and the spectral-structural barrier (the single-crossing framework does not apply) are therefore complementary: the first limits the adiabatic approach with the rank-one driver when the problem Hamiltonian has rich spectral structure, while the second limits alternative drivers even when spectral information is available.

Estimating  $A_1$  to the much coarser precision  $1/\text{poly}(n)$  is already NP-hard: two queries to an  $A_1$ -oracle suffice to solve 3-SAT ([section 8.1](#)). Computing  $A_1$  exactly, or to exponentially small precision  $O(2^{-\text{poly}(n)})$ , is #P-hard: polynomial interpolation extracts all degeneracies  $d_k$  from polynomially many queries ([section 8.2](#)). At the algorithmically relevant precision  $2^{-n/2}$ , the interpolation technique breaks down, but a quantum algorithm achieves  $O(2^{n/2})$  queries while any classical algorithm requires  $\Omega(2^n)$ , yielding a Grover-type quadratic separation ([section 8.3](#)).

### 8.1 NP-Hardness of Estimating $A_1$

The Hamiltonian  $H_z$  encodes an optimization problem whose ground energy  $E_0$  determines whether a solution exists. For a 3-SAT instance,  $E_0 = 0$  when a satisfying assignment exists and  $E_0 \geq 1/\text{poly}(n)$  otherwise. Distinguishing these two cases is the local Hamiltonian promise problem, known to be NP-hard [26]. The

spectral parameter  $A_1$  is not obviously related to this decision problem — it aggregates information about all energy levels, not just the ground energy. A modified Hamiltonian  $H'$  creates a bridge: comparing  $A_1(H')$  with  $A_1(H)$  reveals whether  $E_0$  vanishes.

Define the  $(n+1)$ -qubit Hamiltonian

$$H' = H \otimes \frac{I + \sigma_z}{2}. \quad (8.1.1)$$

The operator  $(I + \sigma_z)/2$  is the projector onto  $|0\rangle$  for the ancilla qubit: it has eigenvalue 1 on  $|0\rangle$  and eigenvalue 0 on  $|1\rangle$ . On the  $|0\rangle$  branch,  $H'$  has the same spectrum as  $H$ : eigenvalues  $E_k$  with degeneracies  $d_k$ . On the  $|1\rangle$  branch,  $H'$  annihilates every state, contributing  $2^n$  eigenvalues at energy 0. The ground energy of  $H'$  is therefore always zero, regardless of  $E_0(H)$ . This invariance is the mechanism:  $A_1(H')$  measures the spectrum from a fixed reference point  $E'_0 = 0$ , while  $A_1(H)$  measures from the variable reference  $E_0(H)$ . When  $E_0(H) > 0$ , the two measurements diverge, and the divergence is detectable.

**Lemma 8.1.1** (Disambiguation [14]). *Let  $\varepsilon, \mu_1, \mu_2 \in (0, 1)$ . Suppose  $\mathcal{C}_\varepsilon$  is a procedure that accepts the description of a Hamiltonian  $H$  and outputs  $\tilde{A}_1(H)$  with  $|\tilde{A}_1(H) - A_1(H)| \leq \varepsilon$ . Let  $H$  be an  $n$ -qubit diagonal Hamiltonian with eigenvalues  $0 \leq E_0 < E_1 < \dots < E_{M-1} \leq 1$  and  $M \in \text{poly}(n)$ , such that either (i)  $E_0 = 0$  or (ii)  $\mu_1 \leq E_0 \leq 1 - \mu_2$ . Then two calls to  $\mathcal{C}_\varepsilon$  suffice to decide between (i) and (ii), provided*

$$\varepsilon < \frac{\mu_1}{6(1 - \mu_1)} - \frac{d_0}{6N} \cdot \frac{1}{\mu_1 \mu_2}. \quad (8.1.2)$$

*Proof.* Call  $\mathcal{C}_\varepsilon$  on  $H$  and on  $H'$  defined by Eq. (8.1.1), obtaining estimates  $\tilde{A}_1(H)$  and  $\tilde{A}_1(H')$ . The test statistic is  $\tilde{A}_1(H) - 2\tilde{A}_1(H')$ , where the factor 2 compensates for the doubling of the Hilbert space ( $H'$  acts on  $2^{n+1}$  states, so  $A_1(H')$  carries a normalization factor  $1/2^{n+1}$  instead of  $1/2^n$ ).

**Case (i):**  $E_0 = 0$ . The ground energy of  $H'$  is 0 with degeneracy  $d_0 + 2^n$ , and the excited levels of  $H'$  are  $E_1, \dots, E_{M-1}$  with degeneracies  $d_1, \dots, d_{M-1}$ . Since  $E_0 = 0$ , both  $A_1(H)$  and  $A_1(H')$  sum over the same gaps  $E_k - 0 = E_k$ :

$$A_1(H) = \frac{1}{2^n} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k}, \quad A_1(H') = \frac{1}{2^{n+1}} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k}.$$

Therefore  $A_1(H) - 2A_1(H') = 0$ , and by the triangle inequality the test statistic satisfies  $|\tilde{A}_1(H) - 2\tilde{A}_1(H')| \leq 3\varepsilon$ .

**Case (ii):**  $\mu_1 \leq E_0 \leq 1 - \mu_2$ . The ground energy of  $H'$  is still 0 (from the  $|1\rangle$  branch), but now  $E_0, E_1, \dots, E_{M-1}$  are all excited levels. Thus

$$A_1(H') = \frac{1}{2^{n+1}} \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k}.$$

Decompose  $A_1(H)$  using the partial fraction identity  $d_k/(E_k - E_0) = d_k/E_k + d_k E_0/(E_k(E_k - E_0))$ :

$$\begin{aligned} A_1(H) &= \frac{1}{2^n} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k - E_0} = \frac{1}{2^n} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k} + \frac{E_0}{2^n} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k(E_k - E_0)} \\ &= \frac{1}{2^n} \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k} - \frac{d_0}{2^n E_0} + \frac{E_0}{2^n} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k(E_k - E_0)}. \end{aligned} \quad (8.1.3)$$

The first sum equals  $2A_1(H')$ . For the remainder sum,  $E_k \leq 1$  and  $E_k - E_0 \leq 1 - E_0$ , so the product  $E_k(E_k - E_0)$  is at most  $1 - E_0$ . Each fraction  $d_k/(E_k(E_k - E_0))$  is therefore bounded from below:

$$\frac{E_0}{2^n} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{E_k(E_k - E_0)} \geq \frac{E_0}{1 - E_0} \cdot \frac{1}{2^n} \sum_{k=1}^{M-1} d_k = \frac{E_0}{1 - E_0} \left(1 - \frac{d_0}{N}\right).$$

Combining with Eq. (8.1.3):

$$\begin{aligned} A_1(H) - 2A_1(H') &\geq \frac{E_0}{1 - E_0} \left(1 - \frac{d_0}{N}\right) - \frac{d_0}{N E_0} \\ &= \frac{E_0}{1 - E_0} - \frac{d_0}{N} \cdot \frac{1 - E_0 + E_0^2}{E_0(1 - E_0)}. \end{aligned} \quad (8.1.4)$$

Since  $1 - E_0 + E_0^2 \leq 1$  and  $E_0(1 - E_0) \geq \mu_1\mu_2$  on the given range, the fraction  $(1 - E_0 + E_0^2)/(E_0(1 - E_0))$  is at most  $1/(\mu_1\mu_2)$ . The first term  $E_0/(1 - E_0)$  is increasing in  $E_0$ , so it is at least  $\mu_1/(1 - \mu_1)$ . Therefore

$$A_1(H) - 2A_1(H') \geq \frac{\mu_1}{1 - \mu_1} - \frac{d_0}{N} \cdot \frac{1}{\mu_1\mu_2},$$

and the test statistic satisfies

$$\tilde{A}_1(H) - 2\tilde{A}_1(H') \geq \frac{\mu_1}{1 - \mu_1} - \frac{d_0}{N\mu_1\mu_2} - 3\varepsilon.$$

The two cases are distinguished when  $3\varepsilon$  from case (i) is separated from the lower bound in case (ii), requiring  $6\varepsilon < \mu_1/(1 - \mu_1) - d_0/(N\mu_1\mu_2)$ .  $\square$

The disambiguation succeeds whenever the positive correction  $E_0/(1 - E_0)$  from the partial fraction identity dominates the negative term  $-d_0/(NE_0)$ , which happens as long as  $d_0/N$  is small relative to  $\mu_1^2\mu_2$ . For the Ising Hamiltonians of interest,  $d_0/N$  is exponentially small in  $n$ , so the condition is easily satisfied.

**Theorem 8.1.2** (NP-hardness of  $A_1$  estimation [14]). *Computing  $A_1(H)$  to additive accuracy*

$$\varepsilon < \frac{1}{72(n-1)}$$

*for a 3-local Hamiltonian  $H$  on  $n$  qubits is NP-hard.*

*Proof.* We reduce 3-SAT to ground-energy disambiguation, following the construction of [27, 14]. Let  $\varphi$  be a 3-SAT formula on  $n_{\text{var}}$  Boolean variables  $x_0, \dots, x_{n_{\text{var}}-1}$  with  $m$  clauses, each of the form  $a_k \vee b_k \vee c_k$  where each literal is some  $x_l$  or  $\bar{x}_l$ . If  $n_{\text{var}} + m < 15$ , solve by brute force. Otherwise, define the single-qubit projectors

$$P_{x_l} = \frac{I - \sigma_z^{(l)}}{2}, \quad P_{\bar{x}_l} = \frac{I + \sigma_z^{(l)}}{2},$$

which project onto the  $|1\rangle$  and  $|0\rangle$  states of qubit  $l$ , respectively. For each clause  $k$  ( $0 \leq k < m$ ), introduce an auxiliary qubit at index  $n_{\text{var}} + k$  and define

$$\begin{aligned} H_k &= P_{\bar{a}_k} + P_{\bar{b}_k} + P_{\bar{c}_k} + P_{\bar{x}_{n_{\text{var}}+k}} \\ &\quad + P_{a_k}P_{b_k} + P_{a_k}P_{c_k} + P_{b_k}P_{c_k} \\ &\quad + P_{\bar{a}_k}P_{x_{n_{\text{var}}+k}} + P_{\bar{b}_k}P_{x_{n_{\text{var}}+k}} + P_{\bar{c}_k}P_{x_{n_{\text{var}}+k}}. \end{aligned} \quad (8.1.5)$$

Direct computation on the computational basis shows that the minimum eigenvalue of  $H_k$  is 3 when clause  $k$  is satisfied and 4 when it is not; the maximum eigenvalue is 6. The combined Hamiltonian on  $2n_{\text{var}} + 2m$  qubits is

$$H = \frac{1}{6m} \sum_{k=0}^{m-1} H_k + \frac{1}{2n_{\text{var}} + 2m} \sum_{j=n_{\text{var}}+m}^{2n_{\text{var}}+2m-1} P_{x_j} - \frac{1}{2}I. \quad (8.1.6)$$

The first sum normalizes the clause energies to  $[1/2, 1]$ ; the second sum adds  $n_{\text{var}} + m$  free qubits whose projectors prefer  $|0\rangle$ ; the identity shift places the eigenvalues in  $[0, 1]$ . When all clauses are satisfied, there exists an assignment making every  $H_k$  achieve its minimum, giving  $E_0 = 0$ . When some clause is unsatisfied, the minimum of  $\sum H_k/(6m)$  increases by at least  $1/(6m)$ , giving  $E_0 \geq 1/(6m)$ .

Apply **Lemma 8.1.1** with  $\mu_1 = 1/(6m)$  and  $\mu_2 = 1/2$ . The number of eigenvalues is  $N = 2^{2n_{\text{var}}+2m}$  and the ground-state degeneracy satisfies  $d_0 \leq 2^{n_{\text{var}}+m}$ , so  $d_0/N \leq 2^{-(n_{\text{var}}+m)}$ . Substituting into Eq. (8.1.2), the right-hand side satisfies

$$\frac{1}{6} \cdot \frac{1}{6m-1} - \frac{12m}{6} \cdot \frac{d_0}{N} \geq \frac{1}{36(n_{\text{var}}+m-1)} - \frac{2m}{2^{n_{\text{var}}+m}}, \quad (8.1.7)$$

since  $1/(6(6m-1)) \geq 1/(36(n_{\text{var}}+m-1))$  for  $n_{\text{var}} \geq 1$  and  $d_0/N \leq 2^{-(n_{\text{var}}+m)}$ . For  $n_{\text{var}} + m \geq 15$ , the second term satisfies  $2m/2^{n_{\text{var}}+m} \leq 1/(72(n_{\text{var}}+m-1))$ , so the disambiguation succeeds whenever

$$\varepsilon < \frac{1}{72(n_{\text{var}}+m-1)}.$$

The Hamiltonian  $H'$  from Eq. (8.1.1) acts on  $n = 2n_{\text{var}} + 2m + 1$  qubits and is 3-local (since  $H$  is 2-local and the tensor product with  $(I + \sigma_z)/2$  adds one ancilla). Since  $n_{\text{var}} + m \leq n$ , the precision bound  $\varepsilon < 1/(72(n-1))$  follows.  $\square$

For the running example ( $M = 2$ , Grover search), the spectral parameter  $A_1 = (N - 1)/N$  is trivially known from the problem description: there are only two energy levels, and the degeneracies are determined by the number of marked items. The NP-hardness arises from Hamiltonians encoding combinatorial problems with polynomially many energy levels and exponentially small ground-energy gaps, where  $A_1$  depends on the full degeneracy structure in a non-trivial way.

**Remark.** The disambiguation technique extends beyond 3-SAT. The MaxCut decision problem — given a graph  $G = (V, E)$  and integer  $k$ , does  $G$  have a cut of size at least  $k$ ? — also reduces to  $A_1$  estimation. The construction adds a weighted edge to  $G$ , creating an auxiliary Hamiltonian  $H'$  whose  $A_1$  value differs from a reference by at least  $1/(|E|(|E| - 1))$  between the two cases. This yields NP-hardness at precision  $2/(5n^4)$  with a 2-local Hamiltonian, sharpening the locality requirement from 3-local to 2-local at the cost of a slightly tighter precision bound.

## 8.2 #P-Hardness of Computing $A_1$ Exactly

NP-hardness captures the decision problem: is  $E_0 = 0$ ? But  $A_1$  encodes more than a single bit. The spectral parameter is a weighted sum over all energy levels, and its exact value determines every degeneracy  $d_k$ . Extracting these degeneracies solves counting problems —  $d_0$  for an NP-complete Hamiltonian counts the number of satisfying assignments — and counting is harder than deciding: it is #P-complete [28].

The extraction uses a parametrized family of Hamiltonians that shifts the spectrum continuously, turning  $A_1$  into a rational function whose poles carry the degeneracies as residues. For a parameter  $x > 0$ , define the  $(n + 1)$ -qubit Hamiltonian

$$H'(x) = H \otimes I - \frac{x}{2} I \otimes \frac{I + \sigma_z^{(n+1)}}{2}. \quad (8.2.1)$$

On the  $|0\rangle$  branch of the ancilla, the eigenvalues are  $E_k - x/2$  with degeneracies  $d_k$ . On the  $|1\rangle$  branch, the eigenvalues are  $E_k$  with degeneracies  $d_k$ . The ground energy is  $E_0 - x/2$  (from the  $|0\rangle$  branch, for  $x > 0$ ). The gaps relative to this ground energy are  $\Delta_k = E_k - E_0$  (extending the notation  $\Delta = E_1 - E_0$  from earlier chapters to all levels) for the  $|0\rangle$  branch and  $\Delta_k + x/2$  for the  $|1\rangle$  branch.

Computing  $A_1(H'(x))$  from these gaps and defining  $f(x) = 2A_1(H'(x)) - A_1(H)$  isolates the  $|1\rangle$ -branch contribution [14]:

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} \frac{d_k}{\Delta_k + x/2}. \quad (8.2.2)$$

This function is a sum of  $M$  simple poles at  $x = -2\Delta_k$ . Each pole has residue  $2d_k/N$ , encoding the degeneracy of the corresponding energy level. The function  $f$  is a partial-fraction decomposition of the entire degeneracy spectrum. The extraction problem reduces to recovering these residues from evaluations of  $f$ .

**Lemma 8.2.1** (Exact degeneracy extraction [14]). *Suppose  $\mathcal{C}$  is a procedure that computes  $A_1(H)$  exactly for any  $n$ -qubit diagonal Hamiltonian  $H$ . Let  $H_\sigma$  be an Ising Hamiltonian (Equation 5.1.4) with integer eigenvalues and known spectral gaps  $\Delta_k = E_k - E_0$ . Then  $O(\text{poly}(n))$  calls to  $\mathcal{C}$  suffice to compute all degeneracies  $d_0, d_1, \dots, d_{M-1}$ .*

*Proof.* Each evaluation of  $f(x_i)$  requires two calls to  $\mathcal{C}$ : one for  $A_1(H)$  and one for  $A_1(H'(x_i))$ . Evaluate  $f$  at  $M$  distinct positive odd integers  $x_i \in \{1, 3, \dots, 2M - 1\}$ . These values avoid the poles: for each  $k$ ,  $\Delta_k + x_i/2 \geq 0 + 1/2 > 0$  since  $\Delta_k \geq 0$  and  $x_i \geq 1$ . The total cost is  $2M = O(\text{poly}(n))$  oracle calls.

Define the reconstruction polynomial

$$P(x) = \prod_{k=0}^{M-1} \left( \Delta_k + \frac{x}{2} \right) f(x) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=0}^{M-1} d_k \prod_{\ell \neq k} \left( \Delta_\ell + \frac{x}{2} \right). \quad (8.2.3)$$

Multiplying  $f(x)$  by the product of all denominators clears the poles, yielding a polynomial of degree at most  $M - 1$  in  $x$ . Since the gaps  $\Delta_k$  are known integers, the values  $P(x_i) = \prod_k (\Delta_k + x_i/2) \cdot f(x_i)$  are computable from the oracle outputs. The  $M$  values  $P(x_1), \dots, P(x_M)$  determine  $P$  uniquely by Lagrange interpolation [29]: a polynomial of degree at most  $M - 1$  is determined by  $M$  distinct evaluations.

The degeneracies are recovered by evaluating  $P$  at the poles. Setting  $x = -2\Delta_k$  kills every factor  $(\Delta_\ell + x/2)$  except the  $k$ -th, giving

$$d_k = \frac{N \cdot P(-2\Delta_k)}{\prod_{\ell \neq k} (\Delta_\ell - \Delta_k)}, \quad k \in \{0, \dots, M - 1\}. \quad (8.2.4)$$

The denominator is nonzero because the eigenvalues are distinct. The entire computation (oracle calls, Lagrange interpolation, pole evaluation) runs in  $O(\text{poly}(n))$  time.  $\square$

Extracting  $d_0$  from an Ising Hamiltonian encoding a 3-SAT formula counts the number of satisfying assignments, solving #3-SAT. Since #3-SAT is #P-complete [28], an exact  $A_1$  oracle would solve every problem in #P in polynomial time. The degeneracies also determine the output probability of an IQP circuit [30]: from the  $d_k$  and  $\Delta_k$ , one computes  $|\langle 0^n | C_{\text{IQP}} | 0^n \rangle|^2 = |N^{-1} \sum_k d_k e^{i\Delta_k}|^2$ , which is itself #P-hard. The NP-hardness of section 8.1 uses a 3-local Hamiltonian (the ancilla qubit raises the locality by one). The #P-hardness holds for 2-local Ising Hamiltonians, since the parametrized construction in Eq. (8.2.1) preserves 2-locality when  $H$  is 2-local.

The exact oracle is unrealistic. A robust version of Lemma 8.2.1 must tolerate additive noise  $\varepsilon$  in the oracle outputs. Paturi's amplification lemma controls how pointwise bounds on a polynomial propagate across an interval.

**Lemma 8.2.2** (Paturi [31]). *Let  $P(x)$  be a polynomial of degree at most  $M$  satisfying  $|P(i)| \leq c$  for all integers  $i \in \{0, 1, \dots, M\}$ . Then  $|P(x)| \leq c \cdot 2^M$  for all  $x \in [0, M]$ .*

Paturi's lemma bounds the growth of a polynomial between its sample points: a polynomial bounded by  $c$  at  $M+1$  integer points can exceed  $c$  by at most a factor  $2^M$  on the interval. When applied to the difference between the exact and approximate reconstruction polynomials, it yields a controlled error on the interpolation interval. The oracle noise  $\varepsilon$  propagates to  $f$  as  $|\tilde{f}(x_i) - f(x_i)| \leq 3\varepsilon$  (three oracle calls contribute), then to the polynomial samples as  $|\tilde{P}(x_i) - P(x_i)| \leq 3\varepsilon \prod_k (\Delta_k + x_i/2)$ . The product is at most  $B^M$  where  $B = \Delta_{\max} + M = \text{poly}(n)$ , so each sample has error at most  $3\varepsilon B^M$ .

**Lemma 8.2.3** (Approximate degeneracy extraction [14]). *Under the same hypotheses as Lemma 8.2.1, but with an oracle  $\mathcal{C}_\varepsilon$  satisfying  $|\tilde{A}_1(H) - A_1(H)| \leq \varepsilon$ : for sufficiently small  $\varepsilon \in O(2^{-\text{poly}(n)})$ , all degeneracies  $d_k$  can be computed exactly by  $O(\text{poly}(n))$  calls to  $\mathcal{C}_\varepsilon$ .*

*Proof sketch.* The approximate polynomial  $\tilde{P}$  is the Lagrange interpolant through the noisy values  $(\tilde{P}(x_1), \dots, \tilde{P}(x_M))$ . Its difference  $D = \tilde{P} - P$  is a polynomial of degree at most  $M-1$  bounded by  $3\varepsilon B^M$  at the sample points. By Paturi's lemma (Lemma 8.2.2),  $|D(x)| \leq 3\varepsilon B^M \cdot 2^{M-1}$  on the interpolation interval. At the pole evaluation points  $x^* = -2\Delta_k$ , which lie outside the interval  $[1, 2M-1]$ , the error is bounded by the Lagrange basis amplification:

$$|D(x^*)| \leq 3\varepsilon B^M \cdot \Lambda_M(x^*),$$

where  $\Lambda_M(x^*) = \sum_j \prod_{i \neq j} |x^* - x_i| / |x_j - x_i|$  is the Lebesgue function. For extrapolation outside the interval,  $\Lambda_M(x^*)$  grows exponentially in  $M$ , but since  $M = \text{poly}(n)$ , the total amplification is  $2^{\text{poly}(n)}$ . Dividing by  $\prod_{\ell \neq k} |\Delta_\ell - \Delta_k|$  (also at most  $2^{\text{poly}(n)}$  for integer gaps) and multiplying by  $N = 2^n$ , the degeneracy error satisfies

$$|d_k - \tilde{d}_k| \leq 3\varepsilon \cdot 2^{\text{poly}(n)}.$$

For  $\varepsilon = O(2^{-\text{poly}(n)})$  with a sufficiently large polynomial, this is less than  $1/2$ . Since degeneracies are positive integers, rounding  $\tilde{d}_k$  to the nearest integer recovers  $d_k$  exactly.  $\square$

The proof extends to probabilistic oracles. If  $\mathcal{C}_\varepsilon$  succeeds with probability at least  $3/4$ , then  $O(\text{poly}(n))$  queries produce enough correct sample points to reconstruct  $P$  despite corrupted evaluations. The Berlekamp-Welch algorithm recovers a polynomial of degree  $d$  from  $k$  partially corrupted evaluations, provided at least  $\max\{d+1, (k+d)/2\}$  evaluations are correct [30]. By the Chernoff bound, querying  $k = O(\text{poly}(n))$  times ensures that at least  $(k + M - 2)/2$  evaluations are correct with high probability. Combining this with Lemma 8.2.3:

**Theorem 8.2.4** (#P-hardness of  $A_1$  estimation [14]). *Estimating  $A_1(H)$  to additive accuracy  $\varepsilon = O(2^{-\text{poly}(n)})$  is #P-hard, even for 2-local Ising Hamiltonians. The result holds for both deterministic and probabilistic estimation algorithms.*

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ), the reconstruction polynomial  $P(x) = (d_0/N)(1 + x/2) + (d_1/N)(x/2)$  is linear. Two evaluations determine  $d_0$  and  $d_1$  exactly, and the Lagrange interpolation is trivial: a line through two points. The #P-hardness arises from Hamiltonians with  $M = O(n^2)$  levels, where the reconstruction polynomial has high degree and small errors amplify through the exponential Paturi factor. The error amplification from oracle noise to degeneracy error grows as  $2^{O(M \log n)}$ , a factor that the next section analyzes precisely.

### 8.3 The Intermediate Regime

The adiabatic algorithm requires  $A_1$  to precision  $O(2^{-n/2})$ . NP-hardness holds at  $1/\text{poly}(n)$  ([Theorem 8.1.2](#)), and #P-hardness holds at  $2^{-\text{poly}(n)}$  ([Theorem 8.2.4](#)). The algorithmically relevant precision  $2^{-n/2}$  sits strictly between these regimes. The paper identifies this gap explicitly: “these proof techniques based on polynomial interpolation do not allow us to conclude anything about the hardness of the approximation of  $A_1(H)$  up to the additive error tolerated by the adiabatic algorithm” [14].

We address this open problem. The interpolation technique of the previous section extracts exact integers from approximate real evaluations; we show that the error amplification inherent in polynomial extrapolation makes this extraction impossible at precision  $2^{-n/2}$ .

NP-hardness extends to  $2^{-n/2}$  by monotonicity: an oracle at precision  $2^{-n/2}$  is strictly more powerful than one at  $1/\text{poly}(n)$  (since  $2^{-n/2} < 1/\text{poly}(n)$  for large  $n$ ), so it also solves 3-SAT. But #P-hardness does not extend upward: an oracle at precision  $2^{-n/2}$  is *less* powerful than one at  $2^{-\text{poly}(n)}$ , and the interpolation technique that established the latter breaks down at the former. The following theorem makes this breakdown precise. The proof traces the error propagation through three stages: oracle noise enters the polynomial samples at rate  $\varepsilon B^M$ , the Lebesgue function amplifies this by a factor exponential in  $M$ , and the total amplification overwhelms the rounding margin when  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ .

**Theorem 8.3.1** (Interpolation barrier). *The polynomial interpolation technique of [section 8.2](#) requires oracle precision  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n-O(M \log n)}$  to extract exact degeneracies, where  $M = \text{poly}(n)$  is the number of distinct energy levels. At  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ , the amplified error exceeds  $1/2$  and rounding fails. The #P-hardness argument does not extend to precision  $2^{-n/2}$ .*

*Proof.* We trace the error propagation from oracle noise to degeneracy error through the construction of [Lemma 8.2.1](#). Let  $\varepsilon$  denote the oracle accuracy, and let  $B = \Delta_{\max} + M = \text{poly}(n)$  bound the denominator factors, where  $\Delta_{\max}$  is the largest spectral gap.

**Sample-point error.** The approximate function values satisfy  $|\tilde{f}(x_i) - f(x_i)| \leq 3\varepsilon$ . The approximate polynomial samples are  $\tilde{P}(x_i) = \prod_k (\Delta_k + x_i/2) \tilde{f}(x_i)$ , with error

$$|\tilde{P}(x_i) - P(x_i)| \leq 3\varepsilon \prod_{k=0}^{M-1} \left( \Delta_k + \frac{x_i}{2} \right) \leq 3\varepsilon B^M. \quad (8.3.1)$$

**Degeneracy error.** The approximate degeneracies are computed from Eq. (8.2.4) with  $\tilde{P}$  in place of  $P$ . Since  $\tilde{P}$  is the Lagrange interpolant through the noisy samples, its value at any point  $x^*$  is  $\tilde{P}(x^*) = \sum_j \tilde{P}(x_j) \prod_{i \neq j} (x^* - x_i)/(x_j - x_i)$ . The error at  $x^* = -2\Delta_k$  satisfies

$$|\tilde{P}(x^*) - P(x^*)| \leq 3\varepsilon B^M \sum_{j=0}^{M-1} \prod_{i \neq j} \frac{|x^* - x_i|}{|x_j - x_i|} = 3\varepsilon B^M \cdot \Lambda_M(x^*), \quad (8.3.2)$$

where  $\Lambda_M(x^*) = \sum_j \prod_{i \neq j} |x^* - x_i|/|x_j - x_i|$  is the Lebesgue function at  $x^*$ , measuring the worst-case amplification of pointwise errors by Lagrange interpolation: if each sample has error  $\delta$ , the interpolated value at  $x^*$  has error at most  $\delta \cdot \Lambda_M(x^*)$ . For extrapolation outside the sample interval, this amplification is exponential in  $M$ . For the odd-integer nodes  $x_j = 2j + 1$  and evaluation point  $x^* = -2\Delta_k \leq 0$  (outside the interval  $[1, 2M - 1]$ ): each numerator factor  $|x^* - x_i| = 2\Delta_k + 2i + 1 \leq 2B + 1$ . For the denominator,  $\prod_{i \neq j} |x_j - x_i| = \prod_{i \neq j} 2|j - i| = 2^{M-1} j! (M - 1 - j)!$ , since the nodes are equally spaced with spacing 2. The sum over  $j$  evaluates to

$$\Lambda_M(x^*) \leq \sum_{j=0}^{M-1} \frac{(2B + 1)^{M-1}}{2^{M-1} j! (M - 1 - j)!} = \frac{(2B + 1)^{M-1}}{(M - 1)!}, \quad (8.3.3)$$

using the identity  $\sum_j \binom{M-1}{j} = 2^{M-1}$ . The denominator in Eq. (8.2.4) satisfies  $\prod_{\ell \neq k} |\Delta_\ell - \Delta_k| \geq k!(M - 1 - k)!$  for integer gaps (since  $|\Delta_\ell - \Delta_k| \geq |\ell - k|$ ), with minimum over  $k$  at least  $((M - 1)/(2e))^{M-1}$  by Stirling’s approximation. The total degeneracy error is therefore

$$|d_k - \tilde{d}_k| \leq \frac{3\varepsilon N B^M (2B + 1)^{M-1}}{(M - 1)! ((M - 1)/(2e))^{M-1}}. \quad (8.3.4)$$

Since  $B = \text{poly}(n)$  and  $M = \text{poly}(n)$ , the amplification factor is  $2^{O(M \log n)}$ .

**Rounding condition.** To extract exact degeneracies by rounding, we need  $|d_k - \tilde{d}_k| < 1/2$ . This requires

$$\varepsilon < \frac{1}{6N \cdot 2^{O(M \log n)}} = 2^{-n - O(M \log n)}. \quad (8.3.5)$$

**Evaluation at  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ .** Set  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$  and  $M = n^c$  for some constant  $c \geq 1$ . The error bound from Eq. (8.3.4) evaluates to

$$|d_k - \tilde{d}_k| \leq 3 \cdot 2^{-n/2} \cdot 2^n \cdot 2^{O(n^c \log n)} = 3 \cdot 2^{n/2 + O(n^c \log n)} \gg 1.$$

Even for  $c = 1$  (the most favorable case  $M = n$ ), the exponent  $n/2 + \Omega(n)$  diverges. The upper bound on the degeneracy error already exceeds  $1/2$ , so the rounding step cannot be guaranteed to succeed.  $\square$

The precision  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$  is too coarse for interpolation but too fine for brute force: it sits in a gap that the existing proof techniques cannot reach from either side.

The barrier is not an artifact of the paper's specific construction. The exponential amplification is intrinsic to polynomial extrapolation, independent of node placement.

**Theorem 8.3.2** (Generic extrapolation barrier). *Let  $x_1, \dots, x_d$  be any  $d$  distinct nodes in an interval  $[a, b]$ , and let  $x^*$  satisfy  $\text{dist}(x^*, [a, b]) \geq b - a$ . The Lebesgue function at  $x^*$  satisfies  $\Lambda_d(x^*) \geq 2^{d-1}$ . Consequently, any polynomial extrapolation scheme that evaluates a degree- $(d-1)$  interpolant at  $x^*$  from samples with pointwise error  $\delta$  incurs error at least  $\delta \cdot 2^{d-1}$  at  $x^*$ .*

*Proof.* Assume  $x^* \leq a - (b - a)$  (the case  $x^* \geq b + (b - a)$  follows by symmetry). Let  $x_{(1)} = \min_j x_j \geq a$  be the leftmost node. The corresponding Lagrange basis polynomial satisfies

$$|\ell_{(1)}(x^*)| = \prod_{i: x_i \neq x_{(1)}} \frac{|x_i - x^*|}{|x_i - x_{(1)}|} = \prod_{i: x_i \neq x_{(1)}} \left(1 + \frac{x_{(1)} - x^*}{x_i - x_{(1)}}\right).$$

Each factor has numerator shift  $x_{(1)} - x^* \geq a - (a - (b - a)) = b - a$  and denominator  $x_i - x_{(1)} \leq b - a$ , so every factor is at least 2. With  $d - 1$  such factors,  $|\ell_{(1)}(x^*)| \geq 2^{d-1}$ . Since  $\Lambda_d(x^*) = \sum_j |\ell_j(x^*)| \geq |\ell_{(1)}(x^*)|$ , the bound follows. For an interpolant  $\tilde{P}$  constructed from values with pointwise error  $\delta$ , the worst-case error satisfies  $|\tilde{P}(x^*) - P(x^*)| \leq \delta \cdot \Lambda_d(x^*)$ . Since  $\Lambda_d(x^*) \geq 2^{d-1}$ , this error guarantee cannot be improved below  $\delta \cdot 2^{d-1}$ .  $\square$

**Theorem 8.3.2** closes the door on rescuing the #P-hardness argument through better interpolation schemes. No rearrangement of nodes — equispaced, Chebyshev, or otherwise — no alternative polynomial basis, and no change of variables can reduce the amplification below  $2^{d-1}$ . At  $d = M = \text{poly}(n)$  levels, the required precision remains  $\varepsilon = 2^{-\Omega(n)}$ , exponentially below  $2^{-n/2}$ . The same structural obstacle appears in quantum computational advantage proposals: the polynomial interpolation techniques used to prove hardness of boson sampling [32] and random circuit sampling [33] face analogous amplification barriers when extending hardness from exponentially small to moderate error regimes.

The interpolation barrier does not rule out #P-hardness at  $2^{-n/2}$  by other means. A proof that avoids polynomial extrapolation entirely — using direct algebraic reductions or information-theoretic arguments — might succeed. The barrier identifies where new proof techniques are needed: the challenge is to establish counting hardness without extracting exact integers from approximate real evaluations.

What can be computed at precision  $2^{-n/2}$ ? We analyze the problem in the query model, where each query to a diagonal oracle  $O_H: |x\rangle|0\rangle \mapsto |x\rangle|E_x\rangle$  reveals one diagonal entry of  $H_z$  at unit cost. This framework cleanly separates quantum and classical capabilities. The interpolation barrier is a classical obstruction: it says that polynomial extrapolation cannot extract integers from evaluations at this precision. A quantum algorithm that avoids interpolation entirely — using amplitude estimation instead of polynomial reconstruction — circumvents the barrier.

**Theorem 8.3.3** (Quantum algorithm for  $A_1$ ). *There exists a quantum algorithm that estimates  $A_1(H_z)$  to additive precision  $\varepsilon$  using*

$$O\left(\sqrt{N} + \frac{1}{\varepsilon \Delta_1}\right) \quad (8.3.6)$$

*quantum queries to the diagonal oracle  $O_H$ , where  $\Delta_1 = E_1 - E_0$  is the spectral gap of  $H_z$ .*

*Proof.* The algorithm has two stages.

**Stage 1: Finding  $E_0$ .** The Hamiltonian  $H_z$  is diagonal in the computational basis, so computing  $E_x$  for a given  $|x\rangle$  requires one query to  $O_H$ . Finding the minimum of  $E_x$  over all  $x \in \{0, 1\}^n$  is an instance of quantum minimum finding [34], which succeeds with high probability in  $O(\sqrt{N})$  queries.

**Stage 2: Amplitude estimation of  $A_1$ .** Define the function

$$g(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{E_x - E_0} & \text{if } E_x \neq E_0, \\ 0 & \text{if } E_x = E_0. \end{cases}$$

The spectral parameter is the mean  $A_1 = (1/N) \sum_x g(x)$ . Since the eigenvalues lie in  $[0, 1]$ , the values of  $g$  on non-ground states are in  $[1, 1/\Delta_1]$ . Rescaling to  $h(x) = \Delta_1 \cdot g(x)$  yields  $h(x) \in [0, 1]$ , and  $A_1 = \mu_h/\Delta_1$  where  $\mu_h = (1/N) \sum_x h(x)$ .

Construct a quantum oracle  $U_h$  acting as  $U_h: |x\rangle|0\rangle \mapsto |x\rangle(\sqrt{1-h(x)}|0\rangle + \sqrt{h(x)}|1\rangle)$ . The implementation queries  $O_H$  once to obtain  $E_x$ , performs classical arithmetic on an ancilla to compute  $h(x) = \Delta_1/(E_x - E_0)$  (or 0 for ground states), executes a controlled rotation  $R_y(2 \arcsin \sqrt{h(x)})$  on a flag qubit, and uncomputes the ancilla. Each application uses  $O(1)$  queries to  $O_H$  and  $O(\text{poly}(n))$  auxiliary gates.

Preparing the uniform superposition  $|+\rangle^{\otimes n}$  and applying  $U_h$ , the probability of measuring the flag qubit in  $|1\rangle$  is

$$p = \frac{1}{N} \sum_x h(x) = \mu_h.$$

Amplitude estimation [35] estimates  $p$  to additive precision  $\delta$  using  $O(1/\delta)$  applications of  $U_h$  and its inverse. Setting  $\delta = \varepsilon \Delta_1$  ensures  $|A_1 - \tilde{A}_1| = |\mu_h - \tilde{\mu}_h|/\Delta_1 \leq \varepsilon$ . The number of  $U_h$  applications is  $O(1/(\varepsilon \Delta_1))$ .

Combining both stages:  $O(\sqrt{N})$  queries for Stage 1 and  $O(1/(\varepsilon \Delta_1))$  queries for Stage 2, giving the total in Eq. (8.3.6). For  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$  and  $\Delta_1 = 1/\text{poly}(n)$ :  $O(2^{n/2} + 2^{n/2} \text{poly}(n)) = O(2^{n/2} \text{poly}(n))$ .  $\square$

To confirm that the quantum algorithm's  $O(2^{n/2})$  queries represent a genuine advantage, we need a classical lower bound. The natural approach is information-theoretic: how many samples does a classical algorithm need to distinguish two carefully chosen instances whose  $A_1$  values differ by  $\varepsilon$ ?

**Theorem 8.3.4** (Classical lower bound for  $A_1$  estimation). *Any classical randomized algorithm estimating  $A_1(H_z)$  to additive precision  $\varepsilon$  in the query model requires  $\Omega(1/\varepsilon^2)$  queries in the worst case.*

*Proof.* We construct an adversarial pair of instances that are indistinguishable without sufficiently many queries.

**Instance construction.** Fix  $t = \lceil \varepsilon N \rceil$ . Instance  $H_0$  has a hidden set  $S \subseteq \{0, 1\}^n$  with  $|S| = N/2$ , and eigenvalues  $E_x = 0$  for  $x \in S$ ,  $E_x = 1$  otherwise. Instance  $H_1$  has  $|S'| = N/2 + t$  ground states. The spectral parameters are  $A_1(H_0) = 1/2$  and  $A_1(H_1) = (N/2 - t)/N = 1/2 - t/N$ , differing by  $t/N \geq \varepsilon$ . An algorithm estimating  $A_1$  to precision  $\varepsilon/2$  must distinguish the two instances.

**Information-theoretic bound.** A classical query at string  $x$  reveals  $E_x \in \{0, 1\}$ , equivalent to learning whether  $x \in S$ . Under a uniform prior on  $S$  (or  $S'$ ), successive queries follow a hypergeometric sampling model. Conditioned on previous outcomes, the  $j$ -th query is a Bernoulli trial:  $x$  is a ground state with probability  $p_j^{(i)} = (|S_i| - g_{j-1})/(N - j + 1)$  under hypothesis  $H_i$ , where  $g_{j-1}$  counts ground states already found. The parameter difference  $p_j^{(1)} - p_j^{(0)} = t/(N - j + 1)$  is independent of  $g_{j-1}$ . Since both parameters are  $\Theta(1)$ , a Taylor expansion of the binary KL divergence  $D(p||p + \delta) = \delta^2/(p(1-p)) + O(\delta^3)$  with  $\delta = t/(N - j + 1)$  gives the conditional per-query divergence

$$D_j = O\left(\frac{t^2}{(N - j)^2}\right) = O\left(\frac{t^2}{N^2}\right)$$

when  $q \leq N/2$ . By the chain rule for KL divergence, the total information from  $q$  adaptive queries is

$$D_{\text{KL}}^{(q)} \leq \sum_{j=1}^q D_j \leq q \cdot O\left(\frac{t^2}{N^2}\right).$$

By Le Cam's two-point method [36], reliable hypothesis testing requires  $D_{\text{KL}}^{(q)} \geq \Omega(1)$  (via Pinsker's inequality: total variation distance  $\leq \sqrt{D_{\text{KL}}/2}$ , and distinguishing requires total variation  $\Omega(1)$ ). Therefore

$$q \geq \Omega\left(\frac{N^2}{t^2}\right) = \Omega\left(\frac{1}{\varepsilon^2}\right).$$

At  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ :  $q \geq \Omega(2^n)$ .  $\square$

**Corollary 8.3.5** (Quadratic quantum-classical separation). *In the query model, estimating  $A_1(H_z)$  to precision  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$  exhibits a quadratic quantum-classical separation: quantum complexity  $O(2^{n/2} \text{poly}(n))$  versus classical complexity  $\Omega(2^n)$ .*

*Proof.* The upper bound is [Theorem 8.3.3](#) with  $\Delta_1 = 1$  for the adversarial instance (or  $\Delta_1 = 1/\text{poly}(n)$  in general). The lower bound is [Theorem 8.3.4](#). The separation ratio is  $\Omega(2^{n/2}/\text{poly}(n))$ , matching Grover’s quadratic speedup for unstructured search.  $\square$

The quantum upper bound in [Theorem 8.3.3](#) is tight. For  $M = 2$  instances with  $\Delta_1 = 1$ , estimating  $A_1 = (N - d_0)/N$  to precision  $\varepsilon$  is equivalent to estimating the fraction  $d_0/N$  to precision  $\varepsilon$ , which is an instance of approximate counting. The Grover iterate  $G = (2|+\rangle\langle+| - I)(I - 2\Pi_S)$ , where  $\Pi_S$  projects onto the  $d_0$  ground states, has eigenphases  $\pm 2\theta$  with  $\sin^2 \theta = d_0/N$ . For  $d_0 \approx N/2$ , the derivative  $dp/d\theta = \sin 2\theta = 1$ , so precision  $\varepsilon$  in  $A_1$  requires precision  $\varepsilon$  in  $\theta$ . The Heisenberg limit for quantum phase estimation [37] — the quantum Cramér-Rao inequality with Fisher information  $F_Q \leq 4T^2$  — gives  $T \geq 1/(2\varepsilon)$  applications of  $G$ , each costing  $O(1)$  oracle queries. Combined with the upper bound: the quantum query complexity at precision  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$  is  $\Theta(2^{n/2})$ . The next chapter formalizes this as a theorem and connects it to the broader question of what the quadratic quantum advantage means for the information cost of the adiabatic approach.

For Grover search with  $N = 4$  ( $n = 2$ ), the quantum algorithm uses  $O(\sqrt{4} + 2) = O(4)$  queries at precision  $\varepsilon = 1/2$ , while the classical lower bound gives  $\Omega(4)$ . The separation is trivial at this scale but grows as  $\Omega(2^{n/2}/\text{poly}(n))$  with  $n$ .

Two complementary frameworks apply: computational complexity for the problem of estimating  $A_1$  given an explicit Hamiltonian description, and query complexity for the problem given oracle access to the diagonal entries. The distinction matters because they answer different questions about the same bottleneck. Computational complexity asks: given the Hamiltonian’s description (coupling constants  $J_{ij}$ , local fields  $h_j$ ), can a classical computer extract  $A_1$  efficiently? The input is fully specified and the difficulty lies in the computation itself. Query complexity asks: given black-box access to the diagonal entries  $E_x$ , how many evaluations does any algorithm — classical or quantum — need to estimate  $A_1$ ? The input is hidden behind an oracle, and the difficulty lies in the information content. A problem can be computationally easy but query-hard (when the function evaluations are cheap but many are needed), or query-easy but computationally hard (when few evaluations suffice in principle but each requires solving a hard sub-problem). For the  $A_1$  estimation problem, both frameworks yield hardness results, reinforcing the conclusion that the pre-computation cost is genuine rather than an artifact of a particular algorithmic approach.

In the computational model with an explicit Hamiltonian description, the complexity landscape across precision regimes is:

Precision $\varepsilon$	Hardness	Source
$1/\text{poly}(n)$	NP-hard	<a href="#">Theorem 8.1.2</a>
$2^{-n/2}$	NP-hard	monotonicity
$2^{-\text{poly}(n)}$	#P-hard	<a href="#">Theorem 8.2.4</a>

In the query model with a diagonal oracle at the algorithmically relevant precision  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ :

Model	Complexity	Source
Quantum	$O(2^{n/2} \cdot \text{poly}(n))$	<a href="#">Theorem 8.3.3</a>
Classical	$\Omega(2^n)$	<a href="#">Theorem 8.3.4</a>

The precision  $2^{-n/2}$  coincides with the algorithmic requirement: the adiabatic schedule needs  $A_1$  to precision  $O(\sqrt{d_0/N})$ , which is  $O(2^{-n/2})$  in the worst case  $d_0 = O(1)$ . It is also the interpolation barrier: the proof technique that establishes #P-hardness breaks exactly at this threshold ([Theorem 8.3.1](#)), while NP-hardness extends by monotonicity. And it marks a query complexity transition: at  $2^{-n/2}$ , the quantum algorithm achieves  $O(2^{n/2})$  queries while classical sampling requires  $\Omega(2^n)$ , a Grover-type quadratic gap.

Independent of the query-complexity analysis, classical sampling provides direct evidence for the hardness of  $A_1$  estimation at the algorithmic precision. Given a procedure that samples eigenvalues  $E_x$  according to the distribution  $\{d_k/N\}$ , estimating the mean  $A_1 = \mathbb{E}[1/(E_x - E_0)]$  to precision  $\delta_s$  requires  $O(1/\delta_s^2) = O(2^n/d_0)$  samples by Chebyshev’s inequality [38]. This matches the formal  $\Omega(2^n)$  lower bound of [Theorem 8.3.4](#) up to logarithmic factors, providing a consistency check between the query-complexity result and concrete sampling algorithms.

The hardness results extend beyond adiabatic quantum optimization to a broader class of continuous-time quantum algorithms. Consider the time-independent Hamiltonian  $H = -|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + rH_\sigma$ , where  $r > 0$  is a fixed parameter and  $H_\sigma$  is the problem Hamiltonian. Evolving the initial state  $|\psi_0\rangle$  under  $H$  for time  $t$

produces oscillations between  $|\psi_0\rangle$  and the ground state of  $H_\sigma$ , with a success probability that depends on  $r$ . The oscillation frequency is set by the spectral gap of  $H$ , which is maximized when  $r$  places the system at the avoided crossing — precisely when  $r = A_1$  (up to normalization). For the success probability to be non-negligible,  $r$  must be within  $O(2^{-n/2})$  of  $A_1$  [14]. Any continuous-time algorithm based on this Hamiltonian therefore faces the same information barrier: the parameter  $A_1$  must be known to exponential precision, and computing it is NP-hard. The barrier is not an artifact of the adiabatic framework but a consequence of the spectral structure of rank-one perturbations of diagonal Hamiltonians.

The results of this chapter create a tension. The adiabatic algorithm of [Theorem 7.4.1](#) achieves the Grover speedup  $\tilde{O}(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ , matching the lower bound for unstructured search. But the algorithm’s schedule requires a spectral parameter whose computation is NP-hard, even at a precision far coarser than what the algorithm needs. In the circuit model, Grover’s algorithm achieves the same speedup without pre-computing any spectral parameter: oracle queries gather information adaptively during execution. The adiabatic framework demands the schedule be fixed before evolution begins.

This asymmetry raises a precise question. Does the information cost of the adiabatic approach represent a fundamental limitation, or can it be circumvented? What runtime is achievable by an adiabatic algorithm that knows nothing about the problem Hamiltonian beyond its dimension? The next chapter formalizes this as an information-runtime tradeoff, proving a separation theorem for uninformed schedules and exploring whether adaptive measurements can bypass the classical pre-computation barrier.

# Chapter 9

## Information Gap

The adiabatic algorithm of [Theorem 7.4.1](#) achieves the Grover speedup  $\tilde{O}(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ , but its schedule depends on  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1)$ , whose computation is NP-hard ([Theorem 8.1.2](#)). In the circuit model, Grover's algorithm achieves the same speedup without computing any spectral parameter. The adiabatic framework demands the schedule be fixed before evolution begins. What runtime is achievable by an adiabatic algorithm that knows nothing about the problem Hamiltonian beyond its dimension?

The title of this chapter has three meanings. The spectral gap  $g(s)$  determines the runtime: physics. The gap in knowledge about where the spectral gap reaches its minimum determines what runtime is achievable: information theory. And whether the gap in knowledge matters at all depends on the computational model: complexity theory. These three meanings converge to a single story, told through six sections that progressively resolve the tension created in Chapter 8.

### 9.1 The Cost of Ignorance

The NP-hardness of  $A_1$  is a statement about worst-case classical computation. It does not directly tell us how much runtime an adiabatic algorithm loses by not knowing  $A_1$ . If a fixed schedule that ignores  $A_1$  still achieved  $O(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ , the hardness would be academic. It is not.

**Definition 9.1.1** (Gap class). *The gap class  $\mathcal{G}(s_L, s_R, \Delta_*)$  consists of all gap functions  $g : [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_{>0}$  satisfying: the minimum  $g(s^*) = \Delta_*$  is achieved at a unique point  $s^* \in [s_L, s_R]$ , and  $g(s) > \Delta_*$  for all  $s \neq s^*$ .*

A fixed schedule is determined before the instance is revealed: it depends only on the problem size  $n$  and the target error  $\varepsilon$ , not on spectral properties such as  $s^*$  or  $\Delta_*$ . The schedule induces a velocity profile  $v(s) > 0$  representing the rate at which the evolution traverses the parameter domain  $[0, 1]$ . The total evolution time is  $T = \int_0^1 v(s)^{-1} ds$ . The JRS adiabatic error bound of [Equation 7.1.1](#) controls the transition probability through an integral involving  $\|H'(s)\|^2/g(s)^3$ . Since  $H'(s) = |\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + H_z$  has  $\|H'(s)\| = O(1)$ , the integrand is  $O(g(s)^{-3})$ , concentrated in a window of width  $O(\Delta_*)$  around  $s^*$  where  $g = \Theta(\Delta_*)$ . In this crossing-dominated regime, a schedule with local velocity  $v$  contributes error scaling as  $v^2/\Delta_*^2$ . Maintaining error below  $\varepsilon$  therefore requires  $v \leq v_{\text{slow}} = \sqrt{\varepsilon} \Delta_*$ .

The separation between informed and uninformed schedules is a minimax result: a two-player game where the schedule designer moves first, then an adversary selects the worst-case gap function.

**Lemma 9.1.2** (Adversarial gap construction). *For any  $s_{\text{adv}} \in [s_L, s_R]$  and  $\Delta_* > 0$ , the gap function  $g_{\text{adv}}(s) = \Delta_* + (s - s_{\text{adv}})^2$  belongs to  $\mathcal{G}(s_L, s_R, \Delta_*)$ .*

*Proof.* The function satisfies  $g_{\text{adv}}(s_{\text{adv}}) = \Delta_*$ ,  $g_{\text{adv}}(s) > \Delta_*$  for  $s \neq s_{\text{adv}}$ , and  $g_{\text{adv}}(s) > 0$  for all  $s$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 9.1.3** (Velocity bound for uninformed schedules). *Let  $u$  be a fixed schedule achieving error  $\leq \varepsilon$  for all  $g \in \mathcal{G}(s_L, s_R, \Delta_*)$ . Then  $v(s) \leq v_{\text{slow}}$  for all  $s \in [s_L, s_R]$ .*

*Proof.* Suppose  $v(s') > v_{\text{slow}}$  for some  $s' \in [s_L, s_R]$ . By [Lemma 9.1.2](#), there exists  $g' \in \mathcal{G}$  with minimum at  $s' = s^*$ . The crossing error is  $v(s')^2/\Delta_*^2 > \varepsilon$ , contradicting the assumption.  $\square$

**Theorem 9.1.4** (Separation). *Let  $T_{\text{unf}}$  be the minimum time for any fixed schedule achieving error  $\leq \varepsilon$  for all  $g \in \mathcal{G}(s_L, s_R, \Delta_*)$ , and let  $T_{\text{inf}}$  be the optimal time with known  $s^*$ . Then*

$$\frac{T_{\text{unf}}}{T_{\text{inf}}} = \Omega\left(\frac{s_R - s_L}{\Delta_*}\right). \quad (9.1.1)$$

*Proof.* By Lemma 9.1.3,  $v(s) \leq v_{\text{slow}}$  for all  $s \in [s_L, s_R]$ . The uninformed time satisfies

$$T_{\text{unf}} = \int_0^1 \frac{ds}{v(s)} \geq \int_{s_L}^{s_R} \frac{ds}{v(s)} \geq \frac{s_R - s_L}{v_{\text{slow}}}. \quad (9.1.2)$$

The informed schedule knows  $s^*$  exactly and needs to be slow only in the crossing window of width  $O(\Delta_*)$ , giving  $T_{\text{inf}} = \Theta(\Delta_*/v_{\text{slow}})$  by Theorem 7.4.1 applied to any gap profile in the class (the minimax argument requires only the crossing-window scaling, which holds for all  $g \in \mathcal{G}$  with  $g(s) = \Delta_* + \Theta((s - s^*)^2)$  near  $s^*$ ). The velocity factors cancel:

$$\frac{T_{\text{unf}}}{T_{\text{inf}}} \geq \Theta\left(\frac{s_R - s_L}{\Delta_*}\right). \quad (9.1.3) \quad \square$$

**Corollary 9.1.5** (Unstructured search). *For  $n$ -qubit unstructured search,  $\Delta_* = \Theta(2^{-n/2})$  and  $s_R - s_L = \Theta(1)$ , giving  $T_{\text{unf}}/T_{\text{inf}} = \Omega(2^{n/2})$ .*

For the running example ( $M = 2$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ,  $N = 4$ ), the separation ratio is  $\Theta(1)/\Theta(1/2) = \Theta(2) = \Theta(\sqrt{N})$ . Uninformed adiabatic evolution on this four-element instance takes roughly twice as long as informed evolution, a gap that grows exponentially with  $n$ .

**Remark.** The gap class  $\mathcal{G}$  is defined abstractly: its members are positive functions with a unique minimum, not necessarily gap profiles of physical Hamiltonians. The separation theorem is therefore a minimax lower bound over an abstract function class, which is strictly stronger than a bound restricted to physically realizable gaps. Since the paper's Hamiltonian class produces gap profiles that belong to  $\mathcal{G}$  (with  $\alpha = 1$  near the minimum), the bound applies to the physically relevant setting.

The separation theorem does not say that NP-hardness implies exponential slowdown. The logical structure is: NP-hardness forces the gap-uninformed model for any fixed schedule with polynomial-time classical preprocessing; the gap-uninformed model has the  $\Omega(2^{n/2})$  minimax lower bound from the adversarial geometry of Lemma 9.1.2; therefore this class of algorithms pays the penalty. The penalty comes from the geometry, not from computational complexity directly.

## 9.2 Partial Knowledge and Hedging

The separation theorem quantifies the worst case: an adversary who places the gap minimum anywhere in  $[s_L, s_R]$  forces the schedule to be uniformly slow. But NP-hardness does not mean  $A_1$  is completely unknown. What is the value of partial knowledge?

Suppose an algorithm has access to an estimate  $A_{1,\text{est}}$  satisfying  $|A_{1,\text{est}} - A_1| \leq \varepsilon$ . The uncertainty propagates to the crossing position through the map  $f(x) = x/(x+1)$ , whose derivative is  $f'(x) = 1/(x+1)^2$ .

**Lemma 9.2.1** ( $A_1$ -to- $s^*$  precision propagation). *If  $|A_{1,\text{est}} - A_1| \leq \varepsilon$  with  $|\varepsilon| \leq (1 + A_1)/2$ , then  $|s_{\text{est}}^* - s^*| \leq 2|\varepsilon|/(A_1 + 1)^2$ .*

*Proof.* Direct computation gives the exact identity

$$s_{\text{est}}^* - s^* = \frac{A_1 + \varepsilon}{1 + A_1 + \varepsilon} - \frac{A_1}{1 + A_1} = \frac{\varepsilon}{(1 + A_1)(1 + A_1 + \varepsilon)}. \quad (9.2.1)$$

Under  $|\varepsilon| \leq (1 + A_1)/2$ , the denominator satisfies  $1 + A_1 + \varepsilon \geq (1 + A_1)/2$ , so

$$|s_{\text{est}}^* - s^*| \leq \frac{|\varepsilon|}{(1 + A_1) \cdot (1 + A_1)/2} = \frac{2|\varepsilon|}{(1 + A_1)^2}. \quad (9.2.2) \quad \square$$

Given  $A_1$  precision  $\varepsilon$ , the true crossing position lies within radius  $2\varepsilon/(A_1 + 1)^2$  of the estimate by Lemma 9.2.1, giving an uncertainty interval of width  $W(\varepsilon) = 4\varepsilon/(A_1 + 1)^2$ . The  $\varepsilon$ -informed gap class is  $\mathcal{G}_\varepsilon = \mathcal{G}(s_L(\varepsilon), s_R(\varepsilon), \Delta_*)$ , where the endpoints are determined by the estimate and precision. Applying Theorem 9.1.4 to  $\mathcal{G}_\varepsilon$  with interval width  $W(\varepsilon)$  gives a lower bound; the matching upper bound comes from a schedule that is uniformly slow across the uncertainty interval and fast elsewhere.

**Theorem 9.2.2** (Interpolation). *For  $A_1$  precision  $\varepsilon$ , the optimal adiabatic runtime satisfies*

$$T(\varepsilon) = \Theta\left(T_{\text{inf}} \cdot \max\left(1, \frac{\varepsilon}{\delta_{A_1}}\right)\right), \quad (9.2.3)$$

where  $\delta_{A_1} = 2\sqrt{d_0 A_2/N}$  is the precision threshold for optimality.

*Proof. Lower bound.* For  $\varepsilon \geq \delta_{A_1}$ , **Theorem 9.1.4** applied to  $\mathcal{G}_\varepsilon$  gives  $T(\varepsilon) \geq W(\varepsilon)/v_{\text{slow}}$ . Taking the ratio with  $T_{\text{inf}} = \Theta(\delta_s/v_{\text{slow}})$  and using the identity

$$(A_1 + 1)^2 \cdot \delta_s = (A_1 + 1)^2 \cdot \frac{2}{(A_1 + 1)^2} \sqrt{\frac{d_0 A_2}{N}} = 2 \sqrt{\frac{d_0 A_2}{N}} = \delta_{A_1} \quad (9.2.4)$$

yields  $T(\varepsilon)/T_{\text{inf}} \geq \Theta(\varepsilon/\delta_{A_1})$ . For  $\varepsilon < \delta_{A_1}$ , the trivial bound  $T(\varepsilon) \geq T_{\text{inf}}$  holds regardless of precision.

*Upper bound.* For  $\varepsilon \geq \delta_{A_1}$ , a schedule uniformly slow over the uncertainty interval  $[s_L(\varepsilon), s_R(\varepsilon)]$  and fast elsewhere achieves  $T = O(T_{\text{inf}} \cdot \varepsilon/\delta_{A_1})$ . For  $\varepsilon < \delta_{A_1}$ , the optimal informed schedule achieves  $T = O(T_{\text{inf}})$ .  $\square$

The interpolation is linear: no threshold, no cliff, no phase transition. At precision  $1/\text{poly}(n)$  (NP-hard), the overhead is  $\Theta(2^{n/2}/\text{poly}(n))$ , nearly the full exponential. At precision  $2^{-n/2}$  (algorithmically relevant), the overhead is  $\Theta(1)$ . The space between these two precision scales is the “information gap.” For the running example, the explicit precision table is:

Precision $\varepsilon$	$T(\varepsilon)/T_{\text{inf}}$
$2^{-n/2}$	$\Theta(1)$
$2^{-n/4}$	$\Theta(2^{n/4})$
$1/n$	$\Theta(2^{n/2}/n)$
$1/\text{poly}(n)$	$\Theta(2^{n/2}/\text{poly}(n))$
1 (no knowledge)	$\Theta(2^{n/2})$

The interpolation theorem treats  $A_1$  precision as a continuous resource. A complementary question is operational: given that  $s^*$  lies in a known interval  $[u_L, u_R]$  but the exact position is unknown, what is the best fixed schedule? A hedging schedule distributes its slowdown across the entire uncertainty interval rather than concentrating at a single point: velocity  $v_{\text{slow}}$  for  $s \in [u_L, u_R]$  and  $v_{\text{fast}}$  outside, subject to the normalization  $(u_R - u_L)/v_{\text{slow}} + (1 - u_R + u_L)/v_{\text{fast}} = 1$ . Write  $w = u_R - u_L$  for the interval width. The JRS error integral becomes  $v_{\text{slow}} I_{\text{slow}} + v_{\text{fast}} I_{\text{fast}}$ , where  $I_{\text{slow}} = \int_{u_L}^{u_R} g(u)^{-3} du$  and  $I_{\text{fast}} = \int_{[0,1] \setminus [u_L, u_R]} g(u)^{-3} du$ . Since the crossing lies within the slow region,  $I_{\text{slow}} \gg I_{\text{fast}}$ .

**Theorem 9.2.3** (Hedging). *Let  $R = I_{\text{slow}}/I_{\text{fast}} \gg 1$ . The optimal hedging schedule for interval  $[u_L, u_R]$  achieves  $\text{Error}_{\text{hedge}}/\text{Error}_{\text{uniform}} \rightarrow u_R - u_L$  as  $R \rightarrow \infty$ , with optimal slow velocity  $v_{\text{slow}} = w + \sqrt{(1-w)w/R}$ .*

*Proof.* The normalization constraint  $w/v_{\text{slow}} + (1-w)/v_{\text{fast}} = 1$  fixes the total time  $T = 1$ , so the JRS error integral of **Equation 7.1.1** reduces to  $E = v_{\text{slow}} I_{\text{slow}} + v_{\text{fast}} I_{\text{fast}}$ . Eliminating  $v_{\text{fast}} = (1-w)v_{\text{slow}}/(v_{\text{slow}} - w)$  and differentiating gives  $v_{\text{slow}} = w + \sqrt{(1-w)w/R}$ . For  $R \gg 1$ ,  $v_{\text{slow}} \rightarrow w$  and  $E_{\text{opt}}/E_{\text{unif}} \rightarrow w = u_R - u_L$ .  $\square$

For an uncertainty interval  $[0.4, 0.8]$ , the hedging schedule achieves a 60% error reduction compared to a uniform schedule at the same total runtime. The NP-hardness of  $A_1$  is “soft” in the following sense: bounded uncertainty about  $s^*$  translates to a constant-factor improvement, not an exponential overhead.

### 9.3 Quantum Bypass

The separation theorem and the interpolation theorem characterize the cost of ignorance within the fixed-schedule model. Both assume the schedule is determined before evolution begins. An adiabatic device, however, is a physical system that can be measured during execution. This observation leads to the chapter’s most important positive result, which directly answers the open question posed in the original paper [14]: “Can this limitation be overcome when one only has access to a device operating in the adiabatic setting?”

The answer is yes. Han, Park, and Choi [39] independently proposed a constant-speed adaptive strategy that numerically achieves the quadratic speedup without prior spectral knowledge; the analysis below provides a rigorous proof of optimality for a binary-search protocol. The key insight separates two tasks that NP-hardness conflates: *computing* the crossing position  $s^*$  from the classical description of  $H_z$  is NP-hard, but *detecting*  $s^*$  by probing the quantum system  $H(s)$  at selected parameter values is efficient. The mechanism is phase estimation: the ground and first excited energies of  $H(s)$  differ by  $g(s)$ , and the initial state  $|\psi_0\rangle$  transitions from ground-state-like to excited-state-like as  $s$  crosses  $s^*$ . A binary search with phase estimation at each midpoint locates the crossing.

To make this precise, we need two ingredients: the overlap structure of  $|\psi_0\rangle$  with the instantaneous eigenstates of  $H(s)$ , and the cost of phase estimation at each probe point.

The state  $|\psi_0\rangle$  is the exact ground state of  $H(0) = -|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$ . As  $s$  increases from 0 to 1, the ground state  $|E_0(s)\rangle$  of  $H(s)$  evolves continuously within the two-dimensional symmetric subspace of Chapter 5. The

effective two-level Hamiltonian has diagonal elements that cross near  $s^*$  and off-diagonal coupling  $|V(s)| = (1-s)\sqrt{d_0(N-d_0)}/N = \Theta(\sqrt{d_0/N})$ . The overlap  $|\langle\psi_0|E_0(s)\rangle|^2$  is governed by the mixing angle  $\theta(s)$  satisfying  $\sin 2\theta(s) = 2|V(s)|/g(s)$ , with  $|\langle\psi_0|E_0(s)\rangle|^2 = \cos^2 \theta(s)$ .

For  $s < s^*$  with  $s^* - s \gg \delta_s$ , the gap  $g(s) \geq c_L(s^* - s)$  exceeds the coupling, so  $\theta(s) = O(\sqrt{d_0/N}/(c_L(s^* - s))) = O(\delta_s/(s^* - s)) \ll 1$  and the overlap is  $1 - O(\delta_s^2/(s^* - s)^2)$ : close to 1 everywhere except near the crossing window. At the crossing  $s \approx s^*$ , the diagonal elements are nearly degenerate,  $\theta \approx \pi/4$ , and the overlap is approximately  $1/2$ . For  $s > s^*$  with  $s - s^* \gg \delta_s$ , the ground state has swapped character:  $|\psi_0\rangle$  projects primarily onto the excited branch, and the overlap drops to  $O(\delta_s^2/(s - s^*)^2)$ . At  $s = 1$ , this gives  $|\langle\psi_0|E_0(1)\rangle|^2 = O(\delta_s^2) = O(d_0/N)$ . This transition is what phase estimation detects.

**Definition 9.3.1** (Adaptive adiabatic protocol). *The protocol operates in two phases.*

Phase 1 (Location). Initialize  $s_{\text{lo}} = 0$ ,  $s_{\text{hi}} = 1$ . For  $i = 1, \dots, \lceil n/2 \rceil$ :

1. Prepare the state  $|\psi_0\rangle = |+\rangle^{\otimes n}$ .
2. Set  $s_{\text{mid}} = (s_{\text{lo}} + s_{\text{hi}})/2$ .
3. Apply phase estimation of the Hamiltonian  $H(s_{\text{mid}}) = -(1 - s_{\text{mid}})|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + s_{\text{mid}}H_z$  to the state  $|\psi_0\rangle$ . This requires simulating the unitary  $e^{-iH(s_{\text{mid}})t}$  for time  $t = O(1/g(s_{\text{mid}}))$ .
4. If the measured energy corresponds to the ground state of  $H(s_{\text{mid}})$ : the crossing has not yet occurred, so set  $s_{\text{lo}} = s_{\text{mid}}$ .
5. If the measured energy corresponds to an excited state: the crossing has already occurred, so set  $s_{\text{hi}} = s_{\text{mid}}$ .

After  $\lceil n/2 \rceil$  iterations,  $s^*$  is located to precision  $O(2^{-n/2})$ .

Phase 2 (Execution). Reset the state to  $|\psi_0\rangle$ . Evolve from  $s = 0$  to  $s = 1$  using the informed local schedule of [Theorem 7.4.1](#), with the crossing position estimated in Phase 1.

Phase estimation of  $H(s_{\text{mid}})$  projects  $|\psi_0\rangle$  onto an eigenstate of  $H(s_{\text{mid}})$  and returns the corresponding energy. The Hamiltonian  $H(s_{\text{mid}})$  is a sum of two terms: the rank-one projector  $-(1 - s_{\text{mid}})|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0|$  (implementable via a single-qubit rotation in the  $|\psi_0\rangle / |\psi_0^\perp\rangle$  basis) and the diagonal operator  $s_{\text{mid}}H_z$  (implementable via the problem oracle). Their sum can be simulated via product formulas with  $\text{poly}(n)$  gate overhead per unit time.

For  $s_{\text{mid}} < s^*$ , the state  $|\psi_0\rangle$  has  $\Theta(1)$  overlap with  $|E_0(s_{\text{mid}})\rangle$ , so phase estimation returns the ground energy with constant probability. For  $s_{\text{mid}} > s^*$  with  $|s_{\text{mid}} - s^*| \gg \delta_s$ , the overlap  $|\langle\psi_0|E_0(s_{\text{mid}})\rangle|^2 = O(d_0/N)$ , so phase estimation returns an excited energy with probability  $1 - O(d_0/N) = 1 - o(1)$ . The binary search tolerates  $O(1)$  errors per level, so the constant success probability suffices.

**Lemma 9.3.2** (Phase estimation cost). *Distinguishing the ground state from the first excited state of  $H(s_{\text{mid}})$  via phase estimation requires time  $O(1/g(s_{\text{mid}}))$ .*

*Proof.* Phase estimation resolves energies separated by  $\delta E$  using evolution under  $e^{-iH(s_{\text{mid}})t}$  for time  $t = O(1/\delta E)$ . The two lowest energies of  $H(s_{\text{mid}})$  differ by  $g(s_{\text{mid}})$ , so  $t = O(1/g(s_{\text{mid}}))$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 9.3.3** (Phase 1 cost). *The total time for Phase 1 is  $O(T_{\text{inf}})$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $d_i = |s_{\text{mid},i} - s^*|$  be the distance from the  $i$ -th midpoint to the true crossing. From the piecewise gap profile established in Chapter 6: outside the crossing window ( $|s - s^*| > \delta_s$ ), the gap satisfies  $g(s) \geq c_{\min}|s - s^*|$  where  $c_{\min} = \min(c_L, c_R)$  with  $c_L = A_1(A_1 + 1)/A_2$  and  $c_R = \Delta/30$  (both positive constants independent of  $n$ ); inside the crossing window ( $|s - s^*| \leq \delta_s$ ), the gap satisfies  $g(s) \geq g_{\min}$ . Since  $g_{\min}$  is the global minimum, both cases combine to

$$g(s_{\text{mid},i}) \geq \max(g_{\min}, c_{\min} \cdot d_i). \quad (9.3.1)$$

The phase estimation cost at iteration  $i$  is therefore

$$O\left(\frac{1}{g(s_{\text{mid},i})}\right) \leq O\left(\min\left(\frac{1}{g_{\min}}, \frac{1}{c_{\min} \cdot d_i}\right)\right). \quad (9.3.2)$$

Since  $c_{\min} \cdot \delta_s = \Theta(g_{\min})$  (from  $c_L \cdot \delta_s = \hat{g} = \Theta(g_{\min})$  and  $c_{\min} = \Theta(c_L)$ ), the two bounds cross at  $d_i = \Theta(\delta_s) = \Theta(\Delta_*)$ .

Group the  $\lceil n/2 \rceil$  iterations by the distance  $d_i$  in dyadic shells. For any fixed  $s^*$ , at most  $O(1)$  binary search midpoints fall in each shell  $d_i \in [2^{-j-1}, 2^{-j}]$ .

*Far shells* ( $j < \log_2(1/\delta_s) \approx n/2$ ): here  $d_i > \delta_s$ , so the binding bound in (9.3.2) is  $O(1/(c_{\min} \cdot d_i)) = O(2^j/c_{\min})$ , where  $c_{\min}$  enters the implicit constant.

*Near shells* ( $j \geq n/2$ ): here  $d_i \leq \delta_s$ , so the binding bound is  $O(1/g_{\min}) = O(1/\Delta_*) = O(2^{n/2})$ .

There are  $O(1)$  near shells (at most  $O(1)$  midpoints can have  $d_i \leq \delta_s$  in a binary search). The total cost is:

$$\sum_{j=0}^{n/2-1} O(1) \cdot O(2^j) + O(1) \cdot O(2^{n/2}) = O(2^{n/2}) + O(2^{n/2}) = O(2^{n/2}) = O(T_{\text{inf}}). \quad (9.3.3)$$

The state preparation cost is  $O(n)$  per iteration and  $O(n)$  iterations, giving  $O(n^2) = o(T_{\text{inf}})$ .  $\square$

**Theorem 9.3.4** (Adaptive adiabatic optimality). *The adaptive protocol of Definition 9.3.1 achieves runtime  $T_{\text{adapt}} = O(T_{\text{inf}})$  with  $\Theta(n)$  measurements.*

*Proof.* Phase 1 locates  $s^*$  to precision  $O(2^{-n/2}) = O(\delta_s)$  using total time  $O(T_{\text{inf}})$  by Lemma 9.3.3. This precision is within the crossing window width  $\delta_s = O(\Delta_*)$ . Phase 2 has time  $O(T_{\text{inf}})$  by Theorem 7.4.1, since the estimate of  $s^*$  is accurate to  $O(\delta_s)$ . The total is  $O(T_{\text{inf}}) + O(T_{\text{inf}}) = O(T_{\text{inf}})$ .  $\square$

**Theorem 9.3.5** (Measurement lower bound). *Any adaptive algorithm achieving  $T = O(T_{\text{inf}})$  requires  $\Omega(n)$  measurements.*

*Proof.* The crossing position  $s^*$  can lie anywhere in an interval of width  $\Theta(1)$ . To achieve the informed runtime, the algorithm must locate  $s^*$  to precision  $\delta_s = O(2^{-n/2})$ , since any larger uncertainty incurs the overhead of Theorem 9.2.2. This means distinguishing among  $\Omega(2^{n/2})$  possible positions. Each measurement yields  $O(1)$  bits of information (the outcome is effectively binary: ground state or excited state). The information needed is  $\log_2(2^{n/2}) = n/2$  bits, requiring  $\Omega(n)$  measurements.  $\square$

The complete characterization of the three adiabatic regimes is now:

Strategy	Runtime	Measurements
Fixed, uninformed	$\Omega(2^{n/2} \cdot T_{\text{inf}})$	0
Adaptive	$O(T_{\text{inf}})$	$\Theta(n)$
Fixed, informed	$O(T_{\text{inf}})$	0

For the running example ( $N = 4$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ,  $n = 2$ ): Phase 1 performs  $\lceil 1 \rceil = 1$  iteration, probing  $s_{\text{mid}} = 0.5$ . The true crossing is at  $s^* = 3/7 \approx 0.429$ , and  $s_{\text{mid}}$  is past the crossing but within the crossing window ( $|s_{\text{mid}} - s^*| = 1/14 \ll \delta_s \approx 1/4$ ). The exact overlap is  $|\langle \psi_0 | E_0(0.5) \rangle|^2 = 3/4$ , so phase estimation is probabilistic rather than decisive at this scale: it reports the ground energy with probability  $3/4$  and an excited energy with probability  $1/4$ . The small instance  $n = 2$  illustrates the protocol's cost structure but not its asymptotic sharpness — the overlap transition becomes increasingly sharp as  $N$  grows and  $\delta_s \rightarrow 0$ , making each binary search step reliable with  $\Theta(1)$  probability whenever  $|s_{\text{mid}} - s^*| \gg \delta_s$ . The gap at  $s_{\text{mid}} = 0.5$  is  $g(0.5) = 1/\sqrt{N} = 0.5$ , so the phase estimation cost is  $O(1/g(0.5)) = O(2) = O(T_{\text{inf}})$ .

Adaptivity provides an exponential improvement, fully matching the informed case. The adaptive protocol uses the paper's specific gap profile, which grows linearly from the crossing. The next section examines how gap geometry affects what schedules can achieve.

## 9.4 Gap Geometry and Schedule Optimality

The previous sections analyzed the paper's specific gap profile, where the gap approaches its minimum linearly ( $g(s) \approx c_L |s - s^*|$  for  $|s - s^*| \gg g_{\min}/c_L$ ). Guo and An [25] independently studied how gap geometry affects the achievable runtime through the measure condition, a regularity condition on the gap function that controls whether the power-law schedule of exponent  $p = 3/2$  achieves the optimal  $O(1/g_{\min})$  scaling. Their work proves sufficiency: the measure condition implies  $T = O(1/g_{\min})$ . We prove the complementary direction — necessity and full characterization — and then build an explicit bridge between the two frameworks.

Consider a gap function with flatness exponent  $\alpha > 0$ : near the minimum,  $g(s) = \Delta_* + c|s - s^*|^\alpha$  for a constant  $c > 0$ . The measure condition requires that  $\mu(\{s : g(s) \leq x\}) \leq Cx$  for all  $x > 0$ , where  $C$  is independent of  $\Delta_*$ .

**Theorem 9.4.1** (Geometric characterization). *The measure condition holds with  $C$  independent of  $\Delta_*$  if and only if  $\alpha \leq 1$ .*

*Proof.* For  $x \geq \Delta_*$ , the sublevel set  $\{s : g(s) \leq x\}$  near  $s^*$  has measure  $\mu = 2((x - \Delta_*)/c)^{1/\alpha}$ .

*Case  $\alpha \leq 1$ .* For  $x \geq \Delta_*$ , the ratio satisfies  $\mu/x = 2((x - \Delta_*)/c)^{1/\alpha}/x \leq 2(x/c)^{1/\alpha}/x = (2/c^{1/\alpha}) \cdot x^{1/\alpha-1}$ . Since  $1/\alpha - 1 \leq 0$ , this is maximized at  $x = \Delta_*$  (where  $\mu = 0$ , so the ratio is 0) or bounded by the global cap  $\mu \leq 1$ . Taking the supremum over both the local formula and the cap:  $C \leq 2^\alpha/c$ , independent of  $\Delta_*$ .

*Case  $\alpha > 1$ .* At  $x = 2\Delta_*$ , the ratio is  $\mu/x = 2(\Delta_*/c)^{1/\alpha}/(2\Delta_*) = c^{-1/\alpha}\Delta_*^{1/\alpha-1}$ . Since  $1/\alpha - 1 < 0$ , this diverges as  $\Delta_* \rightarrow 0$ . No finite  $C$  works for all  $\Delta_*$ .  $\square$

The gap integral  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-\beta} ds$  controls the runtime for power-law schedules. A substitution  $u = c|s - s^*|^\alpha/\Delta_*$  gives the following scaling.

**Lemma 9.4.2** (Gap integral). *For  $\beta > 1/\alpha$ ,*

$$\int_0^1 g(s)^{-\beta} ds = \Theta(\Delta_*^{1/\alpha-\beta}). \quad (9.4.1)$$

*For  $\beta \leq 1/\alpha$ , the integral converges to a  $\Delta_*$ -independent constant.*

*Proof.* The substitution  $u = (c|s - s^*|^\alpha)/\Delta_*$  transforms the integrand near  $s^*$  to  $\Delta_*^{-\beta}(1+u)^{-\beta} \cdot \alpha^{-1}(\Delta_*/c)^{1/\alpha} u^{1/\alpha-1} du$ , giving a factor  $\Delta_*^{1/\alpha-\beta}$  times a convergent integral (convergent as  $u \rightarrow \infty$  iff  $\beta > 1/\alpha$ , which is ensured by the hypothesis, and at  $u = 0$  for all  $\alpha > 0$ ). The contribution from outside a neighborhood of  $s^*$  is  $O(1)$ .  $\square$

**Theorem 9.4.3** (Scaling spectrum). *For a gap function with flatness exponent  $\alpha > 2/3$ , the optimal adiabatic runtime with the  $p = 3/2$  power-law schedule satisfies*

$$T = \Theta(1/\Delta_*^{3-2/\alpha}). \quad (9.4.2)$$

*Proof.* The power-law schedule  $u'(s) = c_p g(u(s))^p$  has normalization constant  $c_p = \int_0^1 g(v)^{-p} dv$ . The JRS error functional becomes

$$\eta \leq \frac{1}{T} c_p \int_0^1 g(v)^{p-3} dv. \quad (9.4.3)$$

By **Lemma 9.4.2**,  $c_p = \Theta(\Delta_*^{1/\alpha-p})$  (requiring  $p > 1/\alpha$ ) and the second integral is  $\Theta(\Delta_*^{1/\alpha+p-3})$  (requiring  $3-p > 1/\alpha$ ). Together these require  $1/\alpha < p < 3 - 1/\alpha$ , an interval of width  $3 - 2/\alpha$ , which is positive if and only if  $\alpha > 2/3$ . The symmetric choice  $p = 3/2$  lies in this interval for all  $\alpha > 2/3$ . Their product is

$$c_p \int_0^1 g^{p-3} dv = \Theta(\Delta_*^{(1/\alpha-p)+(1/\alpha+p-3)}) = \Theta(\Delta_*^{2/\alpha-3}). \quad (9.4.4)$$

Setting  $\eta = O(1)$  gives  $T = \Omega(\Delta_*^{-(3-2/\alpha)}) = \Omega(1/\Delta_*^{3-2/\alpha})$ . The  $p = 3/2$  power-law schedule achieves this scaling, giving a matching upper bound  $T = O(1/\Delta_*^{3-2/\alpha})$ .  $\square$

$\alpha$	Exponent $\gamma = 3 - 2/\alpha$	Measure condition	Runtime
1	1	Holds	$\Theta(1/\Delta_*)$
2	2	Fails	$\Theta(1/\Delta_*^2)$
3	7/3	Fails	$\Theta(1/\Delta_*^{7/3})$
$\infty$	3	Fails	$\Theta(1/\Delta_*^3)$

The runtime exponents form a continuous spectrum from 1 (V-shaped minimum, best case) to 3 (flat minimum, worst case), refuting any binary dichotomy between “easy” and “hard” gap profiles. The paper’s Hamiltonian class sits at  $\alpha = 1$ : by the left-arm bound of **Lemma 6.1.1**,  $g(s) \geq c_L(s^* - s)$  with  $c_L = A_1(A_1 + 1)/A_2 > 0$ , establishing linear growth away from the minimum. This structural  $\alpha = 1$  explains why both the Roland-Cerf analysis and the Guo-An framework achieve the same asymptotic runtime.

The paper [14] and Guo and An [25] are independent works on the same problem class. The paper provides the spectral analysis ( $A_1, s^*$ , piecewise gap bounds), while Guo-An provides the variational optimization (power-law schedule, measure condition). The following results build the explicit bridge.

**Theorem 9.4.4** (Measure condition for the paper’s gap profile). *Under the spectral condition of Chapter 5, the paper’s piecewise-linear gap profile satisfies the measure condition with*

$$C \leq \frac{3A_2}{A_1(A_1 + 1)} + \frac{30(1 - s_0)}{\Delta}, \quad (9.4.5)$$

where  $s_0$  is the right-arm basepoint defined in Chapter 6.

*Proof.* Fix  $x > 0$ . For  $x < g_{\min}$ , the sublevel set is empty. For  $x \geq g_{\min}$ , bound the contribution from each piece of the gap profile. The left arm ( $g(s) \geq c_L(s^* - s)$ ) contributes at most  $x/c_L$ . The crossing window ( $|s - s^*| \leq \delta_s$ ) has width  $2\delta_s = 2\hat{g}/c_L$ , contributing at most  $2x/c_L$  for  $x \geq \hat{g}$  (for  $g_{\min} \leq x < \hat{g}$ , the window contribution  $2\hat{g}/c_L$  is bounded by  $3x/c_L$  since  $\hat{g} \leq x/(1 - 2\eta) \leq 3x/2$  when  $\eta \leq 1/6$ , a condition satisfied in the paper's asymptotic regime where  $\eta = O(\sqrt{d_0/(NA_2)}) \rightarrow 0$ ). The right arm ( $g(s) \geq c_R(s - s_0)/(1 - s_0)$ ) contributes at most  $x \cdot 30(1 - s_0)/\Delta$ . Combining and substituting  $c_L = A_1(A_1 + 1)/A_2$  gives the bound.  $\square$

**Corollary 9.4.5** (Grover measure constant). *For Grover ( $M = 2$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ,  $d_1 = N - 1$ ,  $E_0 = 0$ ,  $E_1 = 1$ ), the exact measure constant is  $C = 1$ .*

*Proof.* The exact gap is  $g(s)^2 = (2s - 1)^2(1 - 1/N) + 1/N$ . Solving  $g(s) \leq x$  gives  $\mu(\{g \leq x\}) = \sqrt{(Nx^2 - 1)/(N - 1)}$  for  $x \in [1/\sqrt{N}, 1]$ , with  $\mu = 1$  for  $x > 1$ . The ratio  $\mu/x$  is increasing on  $[1/\sqrt{N}, 1]$  and equals 1 at  $x = 1$ .  $\square$

For the Grover problem, the exact gap integral is  $\int_0^1 g(s)^{-2} ds = (N/\sqrt{N - 1}) \arctan \sqrt{N - 1} \rightarrow (\pi/2)\sqrt{N}$  as  $N \rightarrow \infty$ . This closed-form evaluation confirms the  $O(\sqrt{N})$  runtime from the piecewise analysis and provides the exact constant.

Both the paper's  $p = 2$  schedule and Guo-An's  $p = 3/2$  schedule achieve the same asymptotic runtime  $T = O(\sqrt{NA_2/d_0}/\varepsilon)$ . The paper's runtime involves the integral  $I = \int_0^1 g(s)^{-2} ds$ ; Guo-An's involves  $C^2/g_{\min}$ .

**Theorem 9.4.6** (Constant comparison). *Write  $a = 3/c_L$  and  $r = 30(1 - s_0)/\Delta$ . Then  $C^2 < I$  if and only if  $(c_L - 1)r^2 - 2ar + a(1 - a) > 0$ . In the right-arm-dominated regime ( $r \gg a$ ) with  $c_L > 1$ , this holds, with  $C^2/I \rightarrow 1/c_L = A_2/(A_1(A_1 + 1))$ .*

*Proof.* With  $C = a + r$  and  $I = a + r^2 c_L$ :  $I - C^2 = (c_L - 1)r^2 - 2ar + a(1 - a)$ . For  $c_L > 1$  and  $r \gg a$ , the leading term  $(c_L - 1)r^2$  dominates.  $\square$

For the Grover problem,  $c_L \rightarrow 2$  as  $N \rightarrow \infty$ , and using exact values  $C_{\text{exact}} = 1$ ,  $I_{\text{exact}} \rightarrow (\pi/2)\sqrt{N}$ , the ratio  $C^2/I \rightarrow 2/(\pi\sqrt{N}) \rightarrow 0$ : the JRS certification is asymptotically tighter. The explicit JRS prefactor for the  $p = 3/2$  power-law schedule is  $B_{\text{JRS}}(3/2) = 8A_H C_\mu + 63A_H^2 C_\mu^2$ , where  $A_H = \|H'(s)\|$  and  $C_\mu$  is the measure constant, making the constant comparison quantitative rather than purely asymptotic. The two frameworks are complementary, not competing. The paper provides the spectral analysis that identifies  $A_1$ ,  $s^*$ , and the piecewise gap structure. Guo-An provides the variational optimization that determines the optimal power-law exponent. Together they give a complete picture: the paper's  $\alpha = 1$  gap sits at the exact boundary where both frameworks apply and the measure condition holds with a bounded constant.

## 9.5 Anatomy of the Barrier

Sections 9.1 through 9.3 established that the  $A_1$  barrier is real for fixed schedules and navigable with adaptivity. Two questions remain. Can the barrier be removed by modifying the Hamiltonian itself — adding ancillas, changing the initial state, or introducing intermediate Hamiltonians? And what kind of computational hardness does  $A_1$  represent?

The paper's Discussion explicitly asks whether modified Hamiltonians (ancillas, intermediate Hamiltonians) can shift  $s^*$  to be spectrum-independent. We show that within the rank-one framework, no instance-independent modification can achieve this. The argument proceeds through four theorems that progressively close escape routes, culminating in a no-go theorem.

Recall from Chapter 5 that for any initial state  $|\psi\rangle \in \mathbb{C}^N$ , the weights  $w_k(\psi) = \sum_{z \in \Omega_k} |\langle z | \psi \rangle|^2$  determine the effective spectral parameter  $A_1^{\text{eff}}(\psi) = \sum_{k \geq 1} w_k(\psi)/(E_k - E_0)$  and the effective crossing position  $s^*(\psi) = A_1^{\text{eff}}(\psi)/(A_1^{\text{eff}}(\psi) + 1)$ . For the uniform superposition  $|\psi_0\rangle$ ,  $w_k = d_k/N$  and  $A_1^{\text{eff}} = A_1$ .

**Theorem 9.5.1** (Product ancilla invariance). *For any product initial state  $|\Psi\rangle = |\psi_0\rangle \otimes |\phi\rangle$  and uncoupled final Hamiltonian  $H_f = H_z \otimes I_{2^m}$ , the extended Hamiltonian  $H_{\text{ext}}(s) = -(1 - s)|\Psi\rangle\langle\Psi| + s(H_z \otimes I_{2^m})$  has the same crossing position  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1)$  as the bare system.*

*Proof.* Decompose the extended Hilbert space  $\mathbb{C}^N \otimes \mathbb{C}^{2^m}$  into the subspace  $\mathcal{V}_\phi = \mathbb{C}^N \otimes |\phi\rangle$  and its orthogonal complement. States  $|z\rangle \otimes |a\rangle$  with  $\langle\phi|a\rangle = 0$  satisfy  $\langle\Psi|z, a\rangle = 0$ , making them exact eigenstates of  $H_{\text{ext}}(s)$  with eigenvalue  $sE(z)$ . These  $N(2^m - 1)$  states do not participate in the avoided crossing. The restriction of  $H_{\text{ext}}(s)$  to  $\mathcal{V}_\phi$  is unitarily equivalent to the bare Hamiltonian  $H(s)$  via the isomorphism  $|\psi\rangle \otimes |\phi\rangle \mapsto |\psi\rangle$ .  $\square$

**Remark.** The crossing position is invariant, but the gap of  $H_{\text{ext}}(s)$  is strictly smaller than the bare gap: for  $d_0 = 1$ , the extra eigenvalues at  $sE_0$  (from states  $|z\rangle \otimes |a\rangle$  with  $z \in \Omega_0$ ,  $a \perp |\phi\rangle$ ) sit between the ground eigenvalue  $\lambda_0(s) < sE_0$  and the crossing branch. Uncoupled ancillas make the gap worse, not better.

**Theorem 9.5.2** (Universality of uniform superposition). *Among all states  $|\psi\rangle \in \mathbb{C}^N$ , the uniform superposition  $|\psi_0\rangle$  is the unique state (up to per-basis-element phases) for which the weights  $w_k(\psi)$  depend only on  $\{E_k, d_k\}$  and not on the specific assignment of energies to computational basis states.*

*Proof.* An energy assignment is a function  $\sigma : \{0, \dots, N-1\} \rightarrow \{E_0, \dots, E_{M-1}\}$  with  $|\sigma^{-1}(E_k)| = d_k$ . The weights under assignment  $\sigma$  are  $w_k(\psi, \sigma) = \sum_{z: \sigma(z)=E_k} |\langle z | \psi \rangle|^2$ . We require  $w_k(\psi, \sigma) = w_k(\psi, \sigma')$  for all assignments  $\sigma, \sigma'$  with the same degeneracies.

Any two such assignments are related by a permutation  $\pi$  of  $\{0, \dots, N-1\}$ . The condition becomes  $\sum_{z \in \Omega_k} |\langle z | \psi \rangle|^2 = \sum_{z \in \Omega_k} |\langle \pi^{-1}(z) | \psi \rangle|^2$  for all  $k$  and all permutations  $\pi$ .

*Necessity.* Consider two-level spectra with  $d_0 = 1$ . For any two basis states  $z_a, z_b$ , the transposition swapping them maps the assignment  $\sigma$  (with  $\sigma(z_a) = E_0$ ) to  $\sigma'$  (with  $\sigma'(z_b) = E_0$ ). The condition forces  $|\langle z_a | \psi \rangle|^2 = |\langle z_b | \psi \rangle|^2$ . Since  $z_a, z_b$  are arbitrary,  $|\langle z | \psi \rangle|^2 = 1/N$  for all  $z$ .

*Sufficiency.* If  $|\langle z | \psi \rangle|^2 = 1/N$  for all  $z$ , then  $w_k = d_k/N$  regardless of the assignment.  $\square$

**Corollary 9.5.3.** *Any instance-independent adiabatic algorithm (same Hamiltonian for all energy assignments with the same degeneracy structure) must use the uniform superposition as initial state, fixing the crossing at  $s^* = A_1/(A_1 + 1)$ .*

**Theorem 9.5.4** (Coupled ancilla limitation). *Consider an extended Hamiltonian  $H_{\text{ext}}(s) = -(1-s)|\Psi\rangle\langle\Psi| + s(H_z \otimes I + V)$  where  $|\Psi\rangle = |\psi_0\rangle \otimes |\phi\rangle$  and  $V$  is instance-independent. No fixed  $V$  makes  $A_1^{\text{eff}}$  constant across all problem instances.*

*Proof.* Consider the two-level family parametrized by  $\Delta > 0$ :  $E_0 = 0, E_1 = \Delta, d_0 = 1, d_1 = N-1$ . For  $\Delta > 2\|V\|$ , by Weyl's inequality the eigenvalues of  $H_f(\Delta) = H_z(\Delta) \otimes I + V$  split into two well-separated clusters: one near energy 0 (within  $\|V\|$  of 0) and one near energy  $\Delta$  (within  $\|V\|$  of  $\Delta$ ). The excited cluster contributes  $\Theta((N-1)/(N\Delta))$  to  $A_1^{\text{eff}}$ , which varies with  $\Delta$ . Since the  $\Theta(1/\Delta)$  term is non-constant,  $A_1^{\text{eff}}(\Delta)$  is non-constant.  $\square$

**Theorem 9.5.5** (Multi-segment rigidity). *Consider a two-segment path where segment 2 has Hamiltonian  $H_2(t) = -(1-t)|\psi_{\text{mid}}\rangle\langle\psi_{\text{mid}}| + tH_z$ . If the algorithm is instance-independent, then the intermediate state  $|\psi_{\text{mid}}\rangle$  must be the uniform superposition, giving the same crossing  $B_1 = A_1$ .*

*Proof.* Segment 2 is a rank-one adiabatic Hamiltonian with initial state  $|\psi_{\text{mid}}\rangle$ . Its crossing position is  $t^* = B_1/(B_1 + 1)$  where  $B_1 = \sum_{k \geq 1} w_k(\psi_{\text{mid}})/(E_k - E_0)$ . If segment 1 does not involve  $H_z$ , then  $|\psi_{\text{mid}}\rangle$  is determined entirely by segment 1's Hamiltonian, which is instance-independent. Since  $|\psi_{\text{mid}}\rangle$  is then the same for all energy assignments with the same degeneracy structure, **Theorem 9.5.2** forces  $w_k = d_k/N$ , so  $B_1 = A_1$ . If segment 1 involves  $H_z$ , then  $|\psi_{\text{mid}}\rangle$  already depends on the spectrum, and the algorithm is not instance-independent.  $\square$

**Theorem 9.5.6** (No-go). *For any adiabatic algorithm using a rank-one initial Hamiltonian, a final Hamiltonian whose ground state encodes the solution, and instance-independent design, the crossing position cannot be made independent of the problem spectrum.*

*Proof.* Combine Theorems 9.5.1–9.5.5: **Theorem 9.5.2** forces the uniform superposition; **Theorem 9.5.1** shows uncoupled ancillas preserve  $s^*$ ; **Theorem 9.5.4** shows coupled ancillas shift  $s^*$  but cannot make it constant; **Theorem 9.5.5** shows multi-segment paths within the rank-one framework cannot escape.  $\square$

The no-go theorem applies specifically to the rank-one framework with instance-independent design. Higher-rank initial Hamiltonians provide a potential escape route. For rank- $k$  projectors  $P = UU^\dagger$ , the secular equation generalizes to the  $k \times k$  determinant condition  $\det(I_k - (1-s)G(\lambda, s)) = 0$  where  $G(\lambda, s) = U^\dagger(sH_z - \lambda I)^{-1}U$ . On the two-level family ( $E_0 = 0, E_1 = \Delta$ ), this reduces to  $\det(I_k - (x/\Delta)B) = 0$  where  $B = U_{\text{exc}}^\dagger U_{\text{exc}}$  and  $x = (1-s)/s$ . Each positive eigenvalue  $\mu$  of  $B$  gives a crossing branch  $s(\Delta) = 1/(1 + \Delta/\mu)$ , non-constant in  $\Delta$ .

**Proposition 9.5.7** (Rank- $k$  two-level obstruction). *Fixed rank- $k$  projectors cannot make crossing positions spectrum-independent on fixed-degeneracy two-level families unless the projector has zero support on excited states.*

For the general multilevel case, the trace argument provides a clean obstruction.

**Proposition 9.5.8** (Trace no-go). *For a rank- $k$  projector  $P = UU^\dagger$  and the multilevel family with gaps  $\Delta_1, \dots, \Delta_{M-1}$ , define the reduced matrix  $A(\Delta) = \sum_{\ell=1}^{M-1} B_\ell/\Delta_\ell$  where  $B_\ell = U_\ell^\dagger U_\ell \succeq 0$  collects the excited-level contributions. If  $B_j \neq 0$  and  $\Delta_j$  varies, then  $\text{tr}(A(\Delta)) = \sum_\ell \text{tr}(B_\ell)/\Delta_\ell$  is non-constant in  $\Delta_j$ . By Weyl's eigenvalue monotonicity theorem, each eigenvalue of  $A(\Delta)$  is a continuous function of  $\Delta_j$ , and the sum of the positive eigenvalues equals  $\text{tr}(A)$ . Since the trace changes, at least one positive eigenvalue — and hence at least one crossing position — must change with  $\Delta_j$ .*

The barrier is structural within the rank-one framework and extends to higher-rank two-level and multilevel families. Whether time-dependent couplings  $V(s)$  or non-rank-one intermediate Hamiltonians provide a genuine escape remains open.

The second face of the barrier concerns the computational nature of  $A_1$  hardness. The paper proves that computing  $A_1$  is NP-hard (at precision  $1/\text{poly}(n)$ ) and #P-hard (exactly). These are different hardness classes: #P counts solutions, while NP decides existence. The distinction matters because  $A_1$  is fundamentally a counting quantity.

**Proposition 9.5.9** ( $A_1$  hardness is counting hardness). *For Boolean CSPs where counting satisfying assignments is #P-hard (including  $k$ -SAT for  $k \geq 2$ ), computing  $A_1$  of the clause-violation Hamiltonian is #P-hard even restricted to satisfiable instances.*

*Proof.* Encode the CSP as  $H_z = \sum_{j=1}^m C_j$  where each  $C_j(x) = 1$  if assignment  $x$  violates clause  $j$ . The paper’s interpolation argument (Theorem 8.2.4) recovers all degeneracies  $d_k$  from polynomially many evaluations of  $A_1$  with shifted parameters, via Lagrange interpolation on the rational function  $f(x) = \sum_k d_k/(\Delta_k + x/2)$ . For satisfiable CSPs,  $d_0$  counts satisfying assignments, and counting is #P-hard by hypothesis.  $\square$

The partition function connection makes this precise. Shifting energies so that  $E_0 = 0$  and defining the Laplace partition function  $Z(\beta) = \sum_x e^{-\beta E(x)}$ , the spectral parameter admits the integral representation

$$A_1 = \frac{1}{N} \int_0^\infty (Z(\beta) - d_0) d\beta. \quad (9.5.1)$$

For integer spectra with  $E(x) \in \{0, 1, \dots, m\}$ , the ordinary generating function  $Z(t) = \sum_x t^{E(x)}$  gives  $A_1 = (1/N) \int_0^1 (Z(t) - d_0)/t dt$ . These representations turn “compute  $A_1$ ” into partition function evaluation, connecting tractability of  $A_1$  directly to tractability of counting problems.

**Proposition 9.5.10** (Bounded treewidth tractability). *For local energy functions  $E(x) = \sum_j E_j(x_{S_j})$  with bounded locality  $|S_j| \leq k$  and a tree decomposition of the primal graph of width  $w$ ,  $A_1$  is computable exactly in  $\text{poly}(n, m) \cdot 2^{O(w)}$  time.*

*Proof.* Write the partition function polynomial  $Z(t) = \sum_x t^{E(x)} = \sum_{q=0}^m d_q t^q$  in factor-graph form:  $Z(t) = \sum_x \prod_j t^{E_j(x_{S_j})}$ . Variable elimination on the tree decomposition computes  $Z(t)$  exactly. At each elimination step, factor tables have at most  $2^{w+1}$  entries, each a polynomial of degree at most  $m$ ; multiplying factors convolves the polynomials (cost  $O(m^2)$  per entry), and summing out a variable adds two polynomials (cost  $O(m)$ ). After  $n$  elimination steps, the result is  $Z(t) = \sum_q d_q t^q$ . Then  $A_1 = (1/N) \sum_{q > E_0} d_q/(q - E_0)$ .  $\square$

The partition function bridge is one-directional: tractable  $Z$  implies tractable  $A_1$  (via the integral representations above), but exact  $A_1$  does not determine low-temperature  $Z(\beta)$ .

**Proposition 9.5.11** (Reverse bridge obstruction). *There exist two diagonal Hamiltonians  $H_z, H'_z$  on  $N = 2^n$  states with the same ground degeneracy ratio  $d_0/N$ , same minimum excitation  $\Delta_{\min}$ , and  $A_1(H_z) = A_1(H'_z)$  exactly, yet  $|Z_{H_z}(\beta) - Z_{H'_z}(\beta)|/N \geq 1/100$  at  $\beta = O(1/\Delta_{\min})$ .*

*Proof.* Fix an integer  $B \geq 3$ . Define two spectra, both with  $d_0/N = 1/2$  and  $\Delta_{\min} = 1/B$ : the first has  $N/8$  states at energy  $1/B$  and  $3N/8$  states at energy  $B$ ; the second has  $N/16$  states at energy  $1/B$  and  $7N/16$  states at energy  $c_B = 7B/(B^2 + 6)$ . Direct computation gives  $A_1 = (B^2 + 3)/(8B)$  for both. At  $\beta = B$ :  $Z_1(B)/N = 1/2 + e^{-1}/8 + 3e^{-B^2}/8$  while  $Z_2(B)/N = 1/2 + e^{-1}/16 + (7/16)e^{-7B^2/(B^2+6)}$ . Since  $7B^2/(B^2 + 6) \geq 4.2$  for  $B \geq 3$ , the difference is at least  $e^{-1}/16 - (7/16)e^{-4.2} > 1/100$ .  $\square$

Three natural conjectures about easy instances of  $A_1$  computation are all false.

**Proposition 9.5.12** (Unique solution does not imply easy  $A_1$ ). *There exist instances with  $d_0 = 1$  for which computing  $A_1$  is #P-hard.*

*Proof.* Multiple energy levels with  $d_0 = 1$  can have #P-hard  $A_1$  from the degeneracies of higher levels. The proof of Proposition 9.5.9 applies to satisfiable instances with  $d_0 = 1$ : the interpolation reduction recovers  $d_1, \dots, d_{M-1}$  from  $A_1$  evaluations, and counting the number of assignments at each violation level is #P-hard.  $\square$

**Proposition 9.5.13** (Bounded degeneracy is vacuous). *If all  $d_k \leq \text{poly}(n)$  and  $M \leq \text{poly}(n)$ , then  $d_0 \geq N - \text{poly}(n)^2$ , and the optimization problem is trivially solvable by random sampling.*

**Proposition 9.5.14** (Hard optimization does not imply hard  $A_1$ ). *The tractability of  $A_1$  is independent of optimization hardness. 2-SAT is in  $P$  but #2-SAT is #P-complete [28], giving easy optimization with hard  $A_1$ . Conversely, Grover search has hard optimization but  $A_1 = (N - 1)/N$  in the promise model where  $d_0$  is given.*

The tractability boundary for  $A_1$  is subtle. It does not align with optimization hardness, is not determined by the number of solutions, and depends on structural properties of the energy landscape (treewidth, partition function tractability) rather than on the difficulty of finding the ground state.

## 9.6 The Complexity Landscape

Chapter 8 established the core query complexity results for  $A_1$  estimation at the algorithmically relevant precision  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ : a quantum algorithm achieving  $O(2^{n/2} \cdot \text{poly}(n))$  queries (Theorem 8.3.3), a classical lower bound of  $\Omega(2^n)$  (Theorem 8.3.4), and a generic extrapolation barrier showing that no polynomial-interpolation scheme can establish #P-hardness at this precision (Theorem 8.3.2). Chapter 8 also argued informally that the quantum bound is tight via the Heisenberg limit. We now formalize this tightness and develop the results that connect  $A_1$  complexity to the information-gap framework of the preceding sections.

**Theorem 9.6.1** (Tight quantum query complexity). *The quantum query complexity of  $A_1$  estimation at precision  $\varepsilon$  is  $\Theta(1/\varepsilon)$ .*

*Proof.* The upper bound  $O(1/\varepsilon)$  follows from Theorem 8.3.3. For the lower bound, consider  $M = 2$  instances with  $\Delta_1 = 1$ : estimating  $A_1 = (N - d_0)/N$  to precision  $\varepsilon$  reduces to approximate counting. The Grover iterate  $G = (2|+\rangle\langle+| - I)(I - 2\Pi_S)$  has eigenphases  $\pm 2\theta$  with  $\sin^2 \theta = d_0/N$ . The adversary chooses  $d_0 = N/2$  so that  $\sin^2 \theta = 1/2$ , where  $|d(\sin^2 \theta)/d\theta| = |\sin 2\theta| = 1$ . Estimating  $A_1 = 1 - d_0/N$  to precision  $\varepsilon$  then requires estimating  $\theta$  to precision  $\varepsilon$ , and the quantum Cramér-Rao bound with Fisher information  $F_Q \leq 4T^2$  gives  $T \geq 1/(2\varepsilon)$  applications of  $G$ , each costing  $O(1)$  oracle queries. At  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ , the quantum complexity is  $\Theta(2^{n/2})$ .  $\square$

This result connects directly to the adaptive protocol of section 9.3: the adaptive protocol achieves  $T_{\text{adapt}} = O(T_{\text{inf}}) = O(2^{n/2})$ , which is the same order as the tight quantum query complexity  $\Theta(2^{n/2})$  for  $A_1$  estimation at the algorithmically relevant precision  $\delta_{A_1} = \Theta(2^{-n/2})$ . This is not a coincidence — both tasks require distinguishing  $\Omega(2^{n/2})$  possibilities with  $O(1)$  information per quantum measurement.

The quadratic quantum advantage persists across all precision scales, not just at  $\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$ .

**Proposition 9.6.2** (Precision phase diagram). *The query complexity of  $A_1$  estimation at precision  $\varepsilon$  is  $\Theta(1/\varepsilon)$  quantum and  $\Theta(1/\varepsilon^2)$  classical. The quantum-to-classical ratio is  $\Theta(1/\varepsilon)$  at every precision scale.*

*Proof.* The quantum upper bound  $O(1/\varepsilon)$  follows from amplitude estimation of  $A_1 = (1/N) \sum_{x: E_x > E_0} 1/(E_x - E_0)$  via Theorem 8.3.3. The quantum lower bound  $\Omega(1/\varepsilon)$  is Theorem 9.6.1. The classical lower bound  $\Omega(1/\varepsilon^2)$  follows from Theorem 8.3.4 and the classical upper bound  $O(1/\varepsilon^2)$  from sampling.  $\square$

**Theorem 9.6.3** (ETH computational complexity). *Under the Exponential Time Hypothesis (ETH), any classical algorithm computing  $A_1$  at precision  $2^{-n/2}$  requires  $2^{\Omega(n)}$  time.*

*Proof sketch.* The paper's Theorem 2 reduces 3-SAT on  $n_{\text{var}}$  variables to  $A_1$  estimation of a 3-local Hamiltonian on  $n = O(n_{\text{var}})$  qubits at precision  $1/\text{poly}(n)$ . An oracle at the finer precision  $2^{-n/2} < 1/\text{poly}(n)$  is strictly more powerful, so it also solves 3-SAT. Under ETH, 3-SAT on  $n_{\text{var}} = \Omega(n)$  variables requires  $2^{\Omega(n_{\text{var}})} = 2^{\Omega(n)}$  time.  $\square$

This upgrades the query complexity separation to a computational complexity separation: the quadratic quantum speedup for  $A_1$  estimation holds not only in the query model but also in the computational model, conditional on ETH.

The generic extrapolation barrier (Theorem 8.3.2) shows that the interpolation breakdown at precision  $2^{-n/2}$  is not an artifact of the paper's specific construction. Any polynomial extrapolation scheme with  $d = \text{poly}(n)$  nodes faces Lebesgue amplification  $\Lambda_d(x^*) \geq 2^{d-1}$ , independent of node placement, so the entire class of polynomial-interpolation reductions for  $A_1$  requires precision  $2^{-\Omega(n)}$ .

**Theorem 9.6.4** (Structure irrelevance).  *$M = 2$  instances (where  $A_1$  reduces to approximate counting) are worst-case for  $A_1$  estimation at the schedule-relevant precision. The sum-of-reciprocals structure of  $A_1$  provides no advantage over generic mean estimation.*

*Proof.* For general  $M$ , write  $A_1 = d_1/(N\Delta_1) + R$  where  $R = (1/N) \sum_{k \geq 2} d_k/(E_k - E_0)$ . The remainder satisfies  $0 \leq R \leq (1/N) \sum_{k \geq 2} d_k/\Delta_1 \leq 1/\Delta_1$  (since  $E_k - E_0 \geq \Delta_1$  for all  $k \geq 1$  and  $\sum d_k \leq N$ ). Crucially,  $R$  is a smooth function of the instance parameters: perturbing any single  $d_k$  by 1 changes  $R$  by  $1/(N(E_k - E_0)) \leq 1/(N\Delta_1)$ . At the schedule precision  $\delta_{A_1} = \Theta(2^{-n/2})$ , this per-element sensitivity is  $O(1/N) = o(\delta_{A_1})$ , so the higher levels are individually invisible. The dominant contribution is  $d_1/(N\Delta_1)$ , which for  $M = 2$  equals  $A_1$  itself. The  $M = 2$  reduction to approximate counting is therefore worst-case: any algorithm for general  $A_1$  immediately gives an algorithm for  $d_0$  estimation, and the quantum search lower bound of Bennett, Bernstein, Brassard, and Vazirani [6], transferred to approximate counting via standard reductions, applies.  $\square$

At the schedule precision, bounded-treewidth instances remain tractable for  $A_1$  computation (**Proposition 9.5.10**). For ferromagnetic Ising models, the partition function  $Z(\beta)$  can be multiplicatively approximated in polynomial time [40], which gives an additive approximation of  $A_1$  at coarse precision via the integral representations of **section 9.5**. However, achieving precision  $\delta_{A_1} = \Theta(2^{-n/2})$  requires the multiplicative accuracy  $\mu = O(2^{-n/2}/B)$  where  $B = O(\log(1/\delta_{A_1})/\Delta_{\min})$ , and the FPRAS runtime scales as  $\text{poly}(1/\mu)$ , which is exponential. The ferromagnetic Ising approximation does not remain tractable at the algorithmically relevant precision.

The  $A_1$  barrier is specific to fixed-schedule adiabatic quantum optimization. It is model-dependent, not information-theoretic. The Dürr-Høyer quantum minimum-finding algorithm [34] achieves  $\Theta(\sqrt{N/d_0})$  in the circuit model with zero spectral side information. It maintains a threshold and iteratively lowers it using Grover search, never computing, estimating, or using  $A_1$ ,  $s^*$ ,  $\Delta$ , or any spectral parameter. The mechanism is amplitude amplification with iterative thresholding, which does not traverse an adiabatic path and does not encounter an avoided crossing.

**Proposition 9.6.5** ( $A_1$ -blindness). *Let  $X_{\text{DH}}$  denote the output of the amplified Dürr-Høyer algorithm (with  $r = O(n)$  repetitions). Then  $I(X_{\text{DH}}; A_1 \mid S_0, E_0) \leq 2^{-\Omega(n)}$ . Conditioned on success ( $X_{\text{DH}} \in S_0$ ), the mutual information is exactly zero.*

*Proof.* Two problem Hamiltonians  $H_z, H'_z$  are ground-equivalent if they share the same ground energy  $E_0$  and ground space  $S_0$ . By symmetry of Grover's algorithm applied to the uniform initial state, the output distribution conditioned on success is  $\text{Uniform}(S_0)$ , regardless of the excited spectrum. Since  $A_1$  depends only on the excited spectrum (via  $\{d_k, E_k\}_{k \geq 1}$ ), the conditional distribution carries zero information about  $A_1$ . The unconditional bound follows: with  $r = O(n)$  repetitions using the Boyer-Brassard-Høyer-Tapp amplification [2], the per-trial success probability is at least  $2/3$ , giving failure probability  $(1/3)^r = 2^{-\Omega(n)}$ . The output distributions on ground-equivalent instances agree on the success event and differ only on the failure event, so by Pinsker's inequality, the mutual information is  $O(2^{-\Omega(n)})$ .  $\square$

The circuit model does not merely avoid computing  $A_1$ ; it is provably blind to it. The adiabatic model, by contrast, both requires and leaks information about  $A_1$ : a schedule tuned to  $A_1$  achieves success probability  $\geq 1 - \varepsilon$ , while the same schedule applied to a ground-equivalent instance with different  $A_1$  yields low success probability. The barrier is also specific to the monotone-schedule adiabatic framework. The following proposition shows that constant controls suffice on the restricted two-level family, refuting the conjecture that all continuous-time rank-one algorithms pay the  $A_1$  barrier.

**Proposition 9.6.6** (Constant-control optimality on two-level family). *For  $H_z = I - P_0$  where  $P_0$  projects onto the  $d_0$ -dimensional ground space, the continuous-time rank-one Hamiltonian  $H = -|\psi_0\rangle\langle\psi_0| + H_z$  with constant controls achieves  $p_0(t^*) = 1$  at  $t^* = (\pi/2)\sqrt{N/d_0}$ , with controls independent of  $A_1$ .*

*Proof.* The dynamics of  $|\psi(t)\rangle = e^{-iHt}|\psi_0\rangle$  in the symmetric subspace reduce to a two-dimensional rotation. The ground-state probability evolves as  $p_0(t) = d_0/N + (1 - d_0/N)\sin^2(\sqrt{d_0/N}t)$ , which achieves  $p_0(t^*) = \sin^2(\pi/2) = 1$  at  $t^* = (\pi/2)\sqrt{N/d_0} = \Theta(\sqrt{N/d_0})$ .  $\square$

The counterexample applies only to the two-level family  $H_z = I - P_0$  and not to general spectra. Under normalized controls  $|g(t)| \leq 1$  and general diagonal spectra, the barrier reappears: for the scaled family  $H_z^{(\delta)} = \delta(I - P_0)$  with minimum excitation  $\delta$ , the runtime satisfies  $T = \Omega(\sqrt{N/d_0}/\delta)$ , which for  $\delta = N^{-1/2}$  gives  $T = \Omega(N/\sqrt{d_0})$ .

The interpolation theorem (**Theorem 9.2.2**) provides the quantitative link between information and runtime. Each additional bit of  $A_1$  precision halves the adiabatic runtime, until  $n/2$  bits suffice for optimality. Formally, if Alice communicates  $C$  bits encoding  $A_1$  to precision  $\varepsilon = \Theta(2^{-C})$ , the adiabatic runtime satisfies  $T(C) = T_{\text{inf}} \cdot \Theta(\max(1, 2^{n/2-C}))$ .

**Theorem 9.6.7** (Bit-runtime information law). *The classical communication cost for the adiabatic model to achieve target runtime  $T$  is  $C^*(T) = \max(0, n/2 - \log_2(T/T_{\text{inf}}))$  bits, while  $C_{\text{circuit}}^*(T) = 0$  for all  $T \geq T_{\text{inf}}$ .*

*Proof.* Inverting  $T(C) = T_{\text{inf}} \cdot 2^{n/2-C}$  gives  $C = n/2 - \log_2(T/T_{\text{inf}})$ . Clamping  $C \geq 0$  and noting that the circuit model achieves  $T = T_{\text{inf}}$  at  $C = 0$  by the Dürr-Høyer algorithm gives both formulas.  $\square$

The complete model comparison, synthesizing results from this chapter and Chapter 8, is:

Model	Info needed	Runtime	Communication
Circuit (Dürr-Høyer)	None	$\Theta(\sqrt{N/d_0})$	0 bits
Fixed AQO, informed	$A_1$ to $2^{-n/2}$	$O(\sqrt{N/d_0})$	$\Theta(n)$ bits
Fixed AQO, $C$ bits	$A_1$ to $2^{-C}$	$T_{\text{inf}} \cdot 2^{n/2-C}$	$C$ bits
Fixed AQO, uninformed	None	$\Omega(N/\sqrt{d_0})$	0 bits
Adaptive AQO	$O(n)$ measurements	$O(\sqrt{N/d_0})$	0 bits
Constant-control, two-level	None	$\Theta(\sqrt{N/d_0})$	0 bits
Quantum $A_1$ estimation	$\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$	$\Theta(2^{n/2})$ queries	—
Classical $A_1$ estimation	$\varepsilon = 2^{-n/2}$	$\Theta(2^n)$ queries	—

The circuit model and the adaptive adiabatic model both achieve optimal performance with zero classical communication. The fixed adiabatic model traces a diagonal: each missing bit doubles the runtime. The  $\Theta(n)$ -bit gap between the circuit model and the fixed adiabatic model is exactly the information content of  $A_1$  at the algorithmically relevant precision. The communication cost is a property of the computational model, not of the computational task.

For the running example ( $N = 4$ ,  $d_0 = 1$ ,  $n = 2$ ): the circuit model uses  $O(2)$  queries at  $C = 0$ ; the informed adiabatic model uses  $O(2)$  queries at  $C = 1$  bit; the uninformed adiabatic model uses  $\Omega(4)$  queries at  $C = 0$ . The one missing bit accounts for the factor-of-two gap.

The information gap is now resolved in all three of its meanings. The spectral gap determines the runtime: within the adiabatic framework, the minimum gap  $g_{\min}$  sets the time scale  $T = O(1/g_{\min})$ , and the gap profile  $g(s)$  determines how the schedule must be shaped. The gap in knowledge determines what runtime is achievable: with no knowledge of where  $g_{\min}$  occurs, the runtime blows up by a factor of  $(s_R - s_L)/\Delta_*$ ; with  $\varepsilon$ -precision knowledge, the overhead is  $\Theta(\max(1, \varepsilon/\delta_{A_1}))$ ; with  $O(n)$  quantum measurements, the overhead vanishes. And whether the gap in knowledge matters at all depends on the computational model: in the circuit model, the quantity  $A_1$  is irrelevant and invisible; in the fixed-schedule adiabatic model, it is essential and NP-hard; in the adaptive adiabatic model, it is acquirable at polynomial cost.

The ignorance taxonomy has five levels, where the overhead is the multiplicative ratio  $T/T_{\text{inf}}$ . Level 0 (no information):  $\Omega(2^{n/2})$  overhead. Level 1 (precision  $\varepsilon$ ):  $\Theta(\max(1, \varepsilon/\delta_{A_1}))$  overhead. Level 2 (bounded interval  $[u_L, u_R]$ ): constant overhead proportional to  $u_R - u_L$ . Level 3 (quantum measurement):  $O(1)$  overhead with  $O(n)$  measurements. Level 4 (circuit model): overhead 1, no spectral information needed.

The adiabatic approach to unstructured search works, achieves the Grover speedup, and is optimal among all schedules. But its information requirements are a structural consequence of the rank-one interpolation path. These requirements are not a fundamental limitation of quantum computation — they are a property of the adiabatic model. The next chapter translates these results into machine-checked formal proofs.

## Chapter 10

# Formalization

Chapter 11

Conclusion

# Bibliography

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