
Playing Aircraft Warfare Game with Reinforcement Learning

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1 Introduction

Aircraft Warfare is a classic game we all enjoyed very much, which is also perfect for fully practicing what we have learned in class, as shown in Figure 1. The rule of the game is rather simple. The **goal** of the player – a upward facing aircraft plane – is to make the score as high as possible. The player can get **reward** by managing to hit enemies – downward facing aircraft planes – with five **actions**, namely, up, down, left, right, and using the bomb. The **state** includes the life value and positions of player and enemies and so on. Game overs when life value decreases to 0.

However, playing the game well is quit tough when it comes to difficult mode. Hence we turn to AI for help. To the best of our knowledge, reinforcement learning has shown to be very successful in mastering control policies in lots of tasks such as object recognition and solving physics-based control problems[1]. Specially, Deep Q-Networks (DQN) are proved to be effective in playing games and even could defeat top human Go players[2, 3]. The reason they can work well is that games can quickly generate large amounts of naturally self-annotated (state-action-reward) data, which are high-quality training material for reinforcement learning. That is, this property of games allows deep reinforcement learning to obtain a large number of samples for training to enhance the effect almost costlessly. For example, DeepMind’s achievements such as playing Atari with DQN, AlphaGo defeating Go masters, AlphaZero becoming a self-taught master of Go and Chess. And OpenAI’s main research is based on games, such as the progress made in Dota. For these reasons, we believe that training agents based on deep reinforcement learning techniques is a promising solution

In this paper, we implement an AI-agent for playing the Aircraft Warfare with Approximate Q-learning method and Deep Q-learning method. For Approximate Q-learning, we extracted four most

useful features, i.e., interactions with the closest aircraft, bomb supply, double bullet, and the trade-off between movement and explosion. We trained our agent with an online learning method. For Deep Q-learning, we utilize a convolutional neural network which takes the screen patch as input and outputs the expected converged sum of the discounted reward of taking each action given the current state of the 6 legal actions. We also trained two DQN in case overfitting.

After training for hundreds of episodes, we evaluate our model on the two different tasks. We show that the proposed approximate Q-learning and DQN substantially perform exactly like human beings when in easy mode. In particular, the DQN has the ability to handle very hard mode well in hard mode but still weaker than human player.

2 Methodology

2.1 Approximate Q-learning

Since the number of states in the Aircraft Warfare Game is extremely large, we choose Approximate Q-learning for reinforcement learning.

2.1.1 Feature Extraction

In total, we extracted four features, which are the interaction with the closest aircraft, the interaction with bomb supply, the interaction with double bullet, and the trade-off between movement and explosion. The following will explain in detail how the features are extracted.

$$Q(s, a) = w_1 f_1(s, a) + w_2 f_2(s, a) + w_3 f_3(s, a) + w_4 f_4(s, a)$$

In this game, it is very necessary to control the distance between our aircraft and enemy aircraft and props. Thus, we use the Manhattan distance to measure the interaction of the aircraft with the external environment. For the current state s , we observe the location of the nearest enemies, game props to the aircraft. Next, we analyze the effect of action a on the Manhattan distance between the aircraft and the aforementioned target. The weights corresponding to each of these features reflect the choices and trade-offs made by the aircraft in various situations. The purpose of the plane's actions can be highly summarized as attacking, dodging, and picking up props. Both affect the value of $Q(s, a)$ and the training of Approximate Q-learning.

2.1.2 Training

In the training phase, we train the learning with multiple hyperparameters and update the weights according to the formula below.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{difference} &= r + \gamma \max_{a'} Q(s', a') - Q(s, a) \\ Q(s, a) &\leftarrow Q(s, a) + \alpha [\text{difference}] \\ w_i &\leftarrow w_i + \alpha [\text{difference}] f_i(s, a) \end{aligned}$$

Our training is an online learning approach. After getting a new state s in each round, we choose the action a with the highest $Q(s, a)$. After taking the action in the current round, we get state s . Then, we use these two states with association to obtain the difference and update the parameters of the model. γ is the discount parameter. α is the learning rate. The adjustment of these two parameters can better help our model to converge.



Figure 1: The Aircraft Warfare Game

2.2 Deep Q Network

Deep Q Network is a kind of Deep Reinforcement Learning, which is a combination of Deep Learning and Q-learning. Due to the limitations of Q-learning that it is impossible to choose the best action when the number of combinations of states and actions is infinite, using a deep neural network to help determine the action is reasonable.

2.2.1 DQN algorithm

In the Aircraft Warfare Game the environment is deterministic, so all the equations listed below are formulated deterministically for simplicity. Our aim will be to train a policy that can maximize the cumulative, discounted reward $R_{t_0} = \sum_{t=t_0}^{\infty} \gamma^{t-t_0} r_t$, here the γ is the discount factor, which should be a constant between 0 and 1 to make sure the sum can converge. In the Q-learning algorithm, we get a table of the Q values of the combinations of states and actions, then we construct a policy that maximizes the rewards:

$$\pi^*(s) = \operatorname{argmax}_a Q^*(s, a)$$

However, since the number of the combinations of states and actions is infinite in this scene, so we use a neural network to resemble Q^* . And by Bellman equation, we get:

$$Q^\pi(s, a) = r + \gamma Q^\pi(s', \pi(s'))$$

The difference between the two sides of the equation is known as the difference discussed in the lecture:

$$\delta = Q(s, a) - (r + \gamma \max_{a'} Q(s', a'))$$

To minimize this difference, we use the Huber loss which acts like the mean squared error when the error is small, but like the mean absolute error when the error is large - this makes it more robust to outliers when the estimates of Q are very noisy. We calculate this over a batch of transitions, B , sampled from the replay memory:

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{|B|} \sum_{(s, a, s', r) \in B} \mathcal{L}(\delta)$$

$$\text{where } \mathcal{L}(\delta) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{2} \delta^2 & \text{for } |\delta| \leq 1, \\ |\delta| - \frac{1}{2} & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

2.2.2 DQN Structure and Training

We first tried a convolutional neural network which takes the screen patch as input and outputs the expected converged sum of the discounted reward of taking each action given the current state of the 6 legal actions. To prevent overfitting, we trained two Deep Q Networks: policy network and target network. They have the same structure but the parameters are different. We get the best action from the policy network and computes the $\max_{a'} Q(s', a')$ from the target network for added stability. To explore the environment, we use the ϵ greedy method when choosing the action and the value of ϵ is decayed with time to lower the regret. However, the result of using the convolutional neural network is not satisfying after we trained it for 600 episodes. The reason for this is that the convolutional neural net combines feature extractor and learning together, so some useless features might be considered by the net.

To solve this problem, we decided to extract the features by ourselves. We mainly considered the position of the plane, the relative position between the nearest enemy and the plane, the type of the nearest enemy, the relative position between the prop and the plane, life number remained, bomb number remained and whether the plane has been strengthened. After training of 600 episodes, we got a satisfying result.

3 Result

To evaluate the performance of Approximate Q-learning and DQN, we first considered the goal of playing this game which is to maximize the score. Therefore, we choose score as our evaluation method. The scores are listed below:

Method	Highest Score	Average Score
Approximate Q-learning	1,324,000	886,000
DQN	1,557,000	1,127,000
Human (group member)	673,000	425,000

Table 1: The highest and average score after training

From these tables, we can find that both Approximate Q-learning and DQN have outperformed our group member in this game, which implies that both methods have achieved satisfying results. To better evaluate the performance of these two methods, we modified the game environment and added a Hard Mode in which the enemies move faster and the number of enemies in the screen becomes larger. The result of Hard Mode is listed below:

Method	Highest Score	Average Score
Approximate Q-learning	1,324,000	886,000
DQN	1,557,000	1,127,000
Human (group member)	673,000	425,000

Table 2: Hard Mode Result

From the viewpoint of human, the keys to maximize the score are getting close to the enemies when the plane can shoot the enemies, getting far away from the enemies when the plane is too close to the enemies and can't shoot the enemies, getting the props when needed. From the process of the AI playing the game, both Approximate Q-learning and DQN have learned these keys. However, the actions taken by the Approximate Q-learning are sometimes very noisy, for example it might frequently take left and right actions when the enemy is in front.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, we presented a complete architecture for playing the Aircraft Warfare. We modified the open source code of Aircraft Wars to extract state and further get features that could be learned by our model. We implemented a model based on approximate Q-learning and trained it using online training method. The performance of the model is quite outstanding. It can both control the distance between our aircraft and enemies and hit the enemies from a relative far distance. To further improve its performance and learn more high-level information, we implements an model with DQN. In easy mode, both approximate Q-learning and deep Q-learning performs just like human beings. And DQN even has a better highest score than human player. That is the DQN model can handle tricky scenarios much better. In hard mode, both are still able to perform near human level. In this project, we used only an external game framework to implement a Q-based model from scratch, taking full advantage of what we learned in class. During this period, we encountered many difficulties, but we solved them one by one and finally achieved satisfactory results.

References

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