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An examination of inverted lists and search querying

An implementation

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# **Introduction**

The action of searching through thousands of documents for a single word in a term is a simple concept, one so simple, that it should not be thought of to be very complicated. Furthermore, this should all be done no longer than a fraction of a second. A huge amount of research and development has gone into creating faster ways to complete this task. Here, the focus is on developing a basic inverted index and querying program.

An *inverted index[[1]](#footnote-1)* is a data structure of documents, consisting of words, which documents and the frequency of the words in the documents. Though many implementations of inverted indexes may also contain information on the location of the words in each document, it was not implemented in this version.

This paper discusses the decisions made in the implementation of the inverted index and related modules, and the querying module.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section discusses index construction and the decisions made regarding handling and processing the text data. In Section 3, the stoplist module will be described, as well as implementation thoughts. Section 4 will focus on the query mechanism and how the function works, and the direction taken. Section 5 explores the size difference between the produced files and the original documents.

# **Index Construction**

This section will contain explain methods and decisions pertaining to document parsing methods. How the data is merged together for further processing to the construction of the inverted index. The formatting of the data written to disk.

## Tokenization of terms

The tokenization and normalization of terms is quite important in the fast and efficient indexing, querying of data.

The method used to process the data is very simple. During the progression of reading the lines of the given collection of documents, the normalization of the text was performed in parallel.

Firstly, general punctuation removal was performed using java Regular Expressions (regex). A simple statement[[2]](#footnote-2) checks for any punctuation that contains non-white-space characters on either side, as separate checks. This allows the program to easily clear commas, quotation-marks, etc.

Decisions regarding text normalization such as dealing with hyphenated words, and acronyms were done with word isolation in mind. It was decided that hyphenated words would be split to their separate words for simplicity. Acronyms would be joined together to remove the need for punctuation processing. The process of removing hyphens and dots is like the above regex methods. Using a basic expression for capturing a hyphen and full-stop character, the characters were replaced with spaces for hyphens, and were outright removed for full-stops.

Continuing using the available methods in the java standard library, a set regex term was constructed to efficiently parse out punctuation and standard word contractions (aren’t -> are not). This set of regex terms were applied to the inputted header and body text for processing prior to internal storage.

Other actions such as *case-folding* were performed in tandem with the regex utilizing existing Java *toLowerCase* functionality.

After the text has been processed, the program will create an internal document for further processing.

## Statistical frequency gathering and data merging

A key step in the creation of inverted index lists is the gathering of the frequency of terms in the document collection.

The implementation of the gathering mechanism in the program employs a HashMap, used for its more efficient non-synchronized nature.

The program iterates through the collection of documents, extracting the heading and text content data, splitting them into a list of strings before running them through the checker program.

The checker module iterates through the list of given text data and checks if the hash-map contains a term. If that term does not exist it will create a new entry for the term in the hash-map, or if that entry does exist but not the document in that terms collection of documents, it will create a new entry for the document under that term. Otherwise, it will increment the current counter for that document under that term. This implementation of the hash-map allows for quick storage and retrieval of the words and the document data. After the collection of terms from the documents, the empty string term is removed.

## Final file format of outputted files

The output files written are in the format of standard data files (no extension).

# **Stoplist**

The stoplist input was taken from the inputted stop list file. In parallel to reading the file, several hashing functions were tested, using the DigestMessage module, for performance. The tests were run on the same data set. The results are as follows;

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Algorithm | Time trials (ms) | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| Java HashCode | 742 | 662 | 857 | 756 |
| MD5 | 2895 | 2473 | 2689 | 2686 |
| SHA1 | 3038 | 2666 | 2611 | 2772 |
| SHA256 | 3228 | 3273 | 3097 | 3199 |

Table 1 - Timings of hashing algorithms compared, timed with the complete program running. Ran on macOS Mojave (13’ - early 2015) 2.7 GHz intel

In Table 1, the average timings of the hashing algorithms are compared. The timings of the more complex algorithms (MD5, SHA1, SHA256) take much longer than the in-built java hash code. Comparing the overall time differences, the MD5 algorithm was chosen. The reasoning behind this decision lies within the fact that there is no need for a higher bit hash, and there is also no need for security in this data. SHA1 and SHA256 processing requirements increase highly over larger datasets and are not needed. Hence, the decision to use MD5.

MD5 is a standard, widely used hash for verifying data that generates a 128-bit hash value. This hash fulfils the needs of the program enough that it was not needed to use higher bit hashing functions.

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# Bibliography

Black, P. E., 2017. *Inverted Index.* [Online]   
Available at: https://www.nist.gov/dads/HTML/invertedIndex.html  
[Accessed 4 August 2019].

1. (Black, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Source code: DocumentHandler, ln 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)