

Data Structures & Algorithm

Course Code: 71203002002

Characteristics of Good Algorithms

What Makes an Algorithm Efficient, Practical, and Robust

- Correctness
- Efficiency
- Finiteness
- Definiteness
- Generality
- Portability
- Scalability



Why Do Characteristics Matter?

- Multiple algorithms can solve the same problem
- Choosing the best one improves time and space efficiency
- Enhances maintainability and scalability
- Essential for real-world usability

Overview of Key Characteristics

- **Correctness:** Produces correct output for all valid input
- **Efficiency:** Uses minimal time and memory
- **Finiteness:** Terminates after a finite number of steps
- **Definiteness:** Steps are unambiguous and clear
- **Generality:** Solves a class of problems
- **Portability:** Can be implemented across platforms
- **Scalability:** Performs well as input size grows

Correctness

- **Definition:** Correct output for every possible valid input
- Test cases and formal verification techniques (loop invariants, proofs)
- Non-negotiable quality for any useful algorithm

Efficiency

- **Time Efficiency:** Execution speed (e.g., $O(n)$, $O(\log n)$)
- **Space Efficiency:** Memory usage
- Better performance with growing data

Finiteness

- **Definition:** Must terminate after finite steps
- Counterexamples include infinite loops (while True)
- Ensures the algorithm completes execution

Definiteness

- **Definition:** Steps are precisely defined and unambiguous
- Prevents confusion during implementation
- Bad vs good examples clarify this importance

Generality

- **Definition:** Solves a wide class of problems
- Not limited to one specific input or case
- Enhances reusability of the algorithm

Portability

- **Definition:** Can be implemented in various languages
- Works across different systems and environments
- Improves flexibility and adoption

Scalability

- **Definition:** Handles large input sizes efficiently
- Performance degrades gracefully with size increase
- Key for big data and large-scale systems

Practical Application: Google Search

- **Correctness:** Fetches relevant web pages
- **Efficiency:** Handles billions of queries quickly
- **Scalability:** Maintains performance at internet scale
- **Portability:** Operates across global server clusters

Summary & Recap

- **A good algorithm is:** Correct, Efficient, Finite, Clear, General, Portable, Scalable
- These traits make algorithms suitable for practical use
- Foundation for writing effective programs