Unleashing Infinite-Length Input Capacity for Large-scale Language Models with Self-Controlled Memory System

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Abstract

Large-scale Language Models (LLMs) are constrained by their inability to process lengthy inputs, resulting in the loss of critical historical information. To address this limitation, in this paper, we propose the Self-Controlled Memory (SCM) system to unleash infinite-length input capacity for LLMs. Our SCM system comprises three key modules: a large language model agent serving as the backbone of the system, a memory stream storing agent memories, and a memory controller updating memories and determining when and how to utilize memories from memory stream. Additionally, the proposed SCM is able to process ultra-long texts without any modification or fine-tuning, which can integrate with any instruction following LLMs in a plug-and-play paradigm. Furthermore, we annotate a dataset to evaluate the effectiveness of SCM for handling lengthy inputs. The annotated dataset covers three tasks: long-term dialogues, book summarization, and meeting summarization. Experimental results demonstrate that our method achieves better retrieval capability and generates more informative responses compared to competitive baselines in long-term dialogues. Moreover, our method significantly outperforms baselines in terms of coverage and coherence in long text summarization tasks.

1 Introduction

Recently, Large-scale Language Models (LLMs) have attracted significant attention due to their remarkable performance in a diverse range of tasks (Brown et al., 2020a; Zeng et al., 2023; Ouyang et al., 2022; Thoppilan et al., 2022; Workshop et al., 2023; Muennighoff et al., 2022). The strong foundational capability of LLMs, achieved through large-scale pre-training on massive text corpora (e.g., In-Context Learning (Brown et al., 2020a), Chain-of-Thoughts (Wei et al., 2022c,b), among others), is a contributing factor to their success. Instruction-tuning (Raffel et al., 2020; Wei

[ChatGPT]:

As an AI language model, I don't have access to your personal information or interests, so I can't say for sure what your hobby is. However, I can suggest some common hobbies that people enjoy such as reading, writing, painting, playing sports, cooking, gardening, playing musical instruments, and many more. You can explore different hobbies and find the one that brings you joy and hilfillment.

[Our SCM System]: Based on our previous conversation, your hobbies include swimming, climbing

include swimming, climbing mountains, and traveling. Is there anything related to those hobbies that you need assistance with?

Figure 1: An example comparing ChatGPT and our SCM system. In the long-term dialogue, when the user mentions a hobby-related topic discussed in a previous conversation, ChatGPT forgets the information due to excessive historical noise. Our SCM system can correctly answer the question.

et al., 2022a; Chung et al., 2022) helps LLMs comprehend natural language task descriptions, while Reinforcement Learning with Human Feedback (RLHF) (Schulman et al., 2017; Stiennon et al., 2020; Bai et al., 2022) aligns generated text with human preferences. The combined capabilities of LLMs have effectively shattered the boundaries between natural language processing tasks, leading to limitless possibilities in the application and research directions of LLMs.

LLMs offer numerous advantages, but their utility is hindered by two main factors: the maximum input length and the computational complexity of self-attention (Wang et al., 2020). Although some models (Press et al., 2022; OpenAI, 2022) are capable of processing long inputs, they may still struggle to capture crucial contextual information in exceptionally lengthy texts. As demonstrated in Figure 1, even the ChatGPT ¹ can miss out on es-

¹We utilize OpenAI *gpt-3.5-turbo-0301*, see model index.

sential context from preceding text because of the accumulation of historical noise, which refers to irrelevant or outdated information that can hinder comprehension.

To address this limitation, we introduce the Self-Controlled Memory (SCM) system, enabling LLMs to process text of infinite length without the need for any modifications or additional training. Our SCM system consists of three essential modules: a large language model agent that serves as the core component, a memory stream that stores the agent's memories, and a memory controller responsible for updating the memories and determining when and how to utilize them from the memory stream. In this system, the input text is divided into segments, which are then provided to the LLM as observations (inputs). Each segment is processed by the LLM using two types of memory: a long-term memory (activation memory) that retains historical information and a short-term memory (flash memory) that captures real-time memory information from the preceding segment. During each step of the processing, the memory controller makes decisions to introduce only necessary memory information to avoid introducing additional noise.

Furthermore, we annotate a dataset to evaluate the effectiveness of SCM for handling lengthy inputs. The annotated dataset covers three tasks: long-term dialogues, book summarization, and meeting summarization. Notably, the number of tokens per instance ranges from 20,000 to 2,000,000, surpassing the capabilities of conventional large language models with context windows smaller than 4,097, which are ill-equipped to handle such extensive textual input. Our experimental results demonstrate that the integration of the SCM system with non-dialogue-optimized LLMs effectively emulates the performance of ChatGPT and surpasses strong baseline models when confronted with ultra-long inputs or long-term dialogues. For summarization tasks, our model augmented with SCM exhibits significantly superior performance in terms of coherence and coverage in generating summaries compared with baseline model.

In this paper, we summarize the key contributions as follows:

 We propose the Self-Controlled Memory (SCM) system to unleash infinite-length input capacity for LLMs, which can decide when and how to introduce memory information to generate the response.

- We contribute a dataset to evaluate the effectiveness of SCM in three tasks: long-term dialogues, book summarization, and meeting summarization.
- Our proposed SCM system does not require any modification or fine-tuning of LLMs, making it highly scalable in terms of memory stream.

2 Methodology

We describe the details of our proposed Self-Controlled Memory (SCM) system in this section. As shown in Figure 2, our SCM system comprises three modules: (1) a large language model agent (Section 2.1) serving as the backbone of the system, (2) a memory stream (Section 2.2) storing agent memories, and (3) a memory controller (Section 2.3) updating memories and determining when and how to utilize memories from memory stream.

2.1 Large Language Model Agent

The large language model agent serves as the core component of our SCM system and is required to generate coherent and accurate responses based on carefully designed instructions (e.g., question answering, summarization,). We employ two powerful LLMs, *text-davinci-003* and *gpt-3.5-turbo*, as agents in our SCM system, respectively. In this paper, we utilize the terms *davinci003* and *turbo* to refer to *text-davinci-003* and *gpt-3.5-turbo-0301* as backbone model correspondingly, for the purpose of brevity.

2.2 Memory Stream

The memory stream stores all historical memory items and can easily achieve high-speed access through cache storage technologies such as Redis or vector databases like Pinecone ². Specifically, each memory item consists of (1) an interaction index, (2) an observation, (3) a system response, (4) a memory summarization (refer to the next paragraph for elaboration) and (5) an interaction embedding that illustrates the current interaction semantics. To obtain the interaction representative embedding, we combine the textual content of both the observation and system response and utilize the *text-embedding-ada-002* model ³ to get the embedding vector of

²https://www.pinecone.io/

³openai-text-embedding document

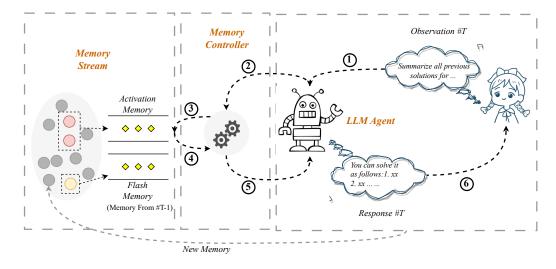


Figure 2: The workflow of our proposed Self-Controlled Memory(SCM) system, where numbers 1-6 represent the six explicit steps of one iteration with new observation #T. These steps are (1) Input Acquisition; (2) Memory Activation; (3) Memory Retrieval; (4) Memory Reorganization; (5) Input Fusion; (6) Response Generation.

the text. When memory retrieval is necessary, the memory stream retrieves and returns two kinds of items: Activation Memory, which stores related historical memories, and Flash Memory, which stores interaction memories from the previous turn T-1.

Memory Summarization Memory summarization plays a vital role in processing lengthy inputs, where a single interaction or dialogue turn can consist of more than 3,000 tokens. Obtaining the key information of individual turns through turn summarization is a non-trivial task when attempting to integrate multi-turn information within a limited contextual window. Figure 3 shows the English prompt that is specifically designed for memory summarization in individual interactions (i.e., dialogue tasks). In addition, other language versions of the prompt can be found in § ??.

Memory Retrieval In our study, we employ an empirical approach of concatenating the observation summary and system response summary (i.e., the memory summarization result of each item) to derive semantic representations for individual items. This concatenation is necessary due to the potential significant variation in length between the observation and system response within the memory stream. Such variation can create an imbalance in the semantic information captured solely from the original texts. Consequently, directly utilizing semantic vectors obtained from the original texts may not effectively balance the semantic information between observations and system responses.

Below is a conversation between a user and an AI assistant. Please provide a summary of the user's question and the assistant's response in one sentence each, with separate paragraphs, while preserving key information as much as possible.

Conversation:

User: {user input}

Assistant: {system response}

Summary:

Figure 3: Prompt for dialogue memory summarization.

2.3 Memory Controller

This section focuses on the central component: the memory controller, and its workflow is illustrated in Figure 4. The primary objective behind the design of the memory controller is to introduce the minimum necessary information to avoid excessive noise that may disrupt the model's performance.

Specifically, this can be divided into three scenarios for discussion. Firstly, not all observations, also referred to as user input or instruction, require access to historical memory. For instance, the user instruction "Tell me a joke" does not necessitate retrieving the user's historical memory. However, certain user input, such as "Do you remember the conclusion we made last week on the fitness diets" requires the retrieval of past memories.

Secondly, the amount of memory can be enormous, ranging from hundreds to thousands or even

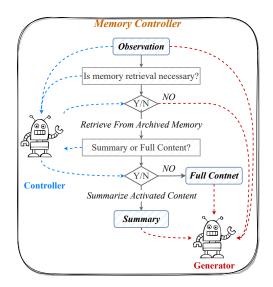


Figure 4: Workflow of the Memory Controller.

tens of thousands. A controller is needed to retrieve and filter the memory.

Thirdly, given the limited input length of the model, it becomes necessary for the controller to determine whether to employ the full content of the memory or a summary of it. The original full text can be excessively long and may exceed the model's maximum length capacity.

In the subsequent subsections, we present the detailed workflow of the memory controller, which considers each of the aforementioned scenarios.

2.3.1 Memory Controller Workflow

The controller is also a language model, which controls the entire process by self-asking two questions:

- 1. Is it necessary to activate memories given current user input?
- 2. Can the current user input be answered correctly using only the summary of memory?

Activate Memories To address the first question, we have devised a prompt for the controller to determine whether or not to activate memories. This prompt is illustrated in Figure 5. If the model responds with "yes(A)", relevant memories will be activated to provide an answer to the current question. During the process of retrieving memories, we employ the current observation as a query and assess the rank score of each memory based on two factors: **recency** and **relevance**. The recency factor places high importance on memory items that have been accessed recently, emphasiz-

Given a user command, determine whether executing the command requires historical or previous information, or whether it requires recalling the conversation content. Simply answer yes (A) or no (B) without explaining the information:

User Command: {User Input}

Answer:

Figure 5: English prompt for the necessity of using memory.

Given the conversation content and the user question, please answer the command question.

Conversation Content: ```{content}```
User Question: ```{query}```

Command Question: Based on the conversation content, can the user question be answered by conversation content? Respond with (A) for yes, (B) for no.

Please strictly follow the format below to answer the questions:

[Answer]: (A) / (B).

Figure 6: English prompt for whether or not to use the summary of memory.

ing the agent's attention on the most recent interactions. Furthermore, the relevance score of each memory is computed by calculating the cosine similarity between the current query embedding and the memory embedding. The final rank score of each memory is determined by summing its recency and relevance scores: $rank_score = recency_score + relevance_score$. Depending on the length limit, we select the top k memories with the highest rank scores as the activated memories. Here, the value of k can range from 3 to 10.

Use Summary To address the second question, we have designed a prompt to evaluate whether the user's question can be answered using the turn summary. This prompt is depicted in Figure 6. We perform this evaluation for each activated memory that exceeds 800 tokens. It is important to highlight that the summary assessment takes place only when the total number of activation memory tokens

Here is a conversation between a user and an AI assistant. Please answer the user's current question based on the history of the conversation:

History of the conversation: {history_turn}

Previous conversation: {last turn}

###

User: {user_input}

Assistant:

Figure 7: English Prompt of ultra-long dialogue generation.

surpasses 2000. If the assessment yields a positive result, indicating that the summary can indeed answer the user's question, we utilize the memory summary to represent that specific memory.

2.4 System workflow

Our SCM system workflow comprises six explicit steps, which are outlined below in a sequential manner:

- 1. Input Acquisition: The agent receives an observation in turn T, either through direct input or from an external source.
- 2. Memory Activation: Based on the current observation, the memory controller determines whether it is necessary to activate memory for the current user input.
- *3. Memory Retrieval:* We utilize the observation as a query to identify top K-ranked memories memories.
- 4. Memory Reorganization: The controller will determine whether to use the original or summarized memory directly. Then, the system will combine the memories retrieved in a structured manner to serve as background information for response generation at this point.
- 5. Input Fusion: We carefully design a prompt that fuses the restructured memory with the present observation to serve as the model's input. Figure 7 shows the details.
- 6. Response Generation: The model generates a response based on the previous step result and incorporates the current interaction, including observation and response, into the memory stream.

| | Dialogue | Book | Meeting |
|--------------|----------|-------|---------|
| #Instances | 18 | 10 | 20 |
| Max tokens | 34k | 2M | 50k |
| Total tokens | 420k | 8M | 632k |
| Max turn | 200 | - | 80 |
| Language | En+Zh | En+Zh | Zh |

Table 1: Evaluation dataset statistics. 2M means 2 million token count.

3 Experiments

Our experiment focuses on evaluating the effectiveness and robustness of the SCM system in three various task scenarios: long-term dialogues, book summarization, and meeting summarization. Specifically, we want to explore whether the SCM system can facilitate long-term, continuous multi-turn conversations in non-dialogue models. Furthermore, we intend to investigate whether memory-enhanced models can offer more comprehensive coverage and create coherent contextual logic summaries compared to traditional models when tackling long text summarization scenarios.

3.1 Evaluation Dataset

In order to evaluate the SCM performance across various scenarios, we collect open-source data from ShareChat ⁴, online book websites ⁵, and the VC-SUM dataset (Wu et al., 2023). Then, we utilize human annotation to create probing questions and summaries for the collected data. The dataset statistics are illustrated in Table 1.

3.2 Quantitative Study

To quantitatively compare the performance of the models, 105 test questions are annotated based on the dialogue data and categorize them into two groups: single-turn related questions and multiturn related questions. Additionally, for evaluating the two summarization tasks, we compare the performance of SCM variants with the baseline model.

Models To ensure a fair comparison, we have selected specific model variants for experimental analysis:

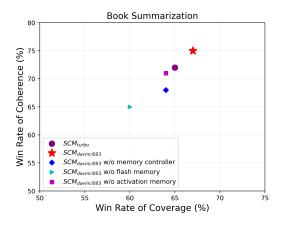
1) SCM $_{\text{turbo}}$: Utilizing gpt-3.5-turbo-0301 as the backbone of our SCM system.

⁴ShareChat

⁵Gutenberg

| Model Name | Answer Acc. | Memory Retrieval Recall | Single Turn Acc. | Multi Turn Acc. |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| SCM turbo | 68.3 | 93.5 | 73.5 | 64.3 |
| SCM davinci003 | 77.1 | 94.0 | 79.6 | 75.0 |
| w/o memory controller | 59.3 (-17.8) | 93.8 (-0.2) | 71.7 (-7.9) | 49.4 (-25.6) |
| w/o flash memory | 72.9 (-4.2) | 93.9 (-0.1) | 74.6 (-5.0) | 74.8 (-0.2) |
| w/o activation memory | 10.5 (-66.6) | 0.0 (-94.0) | 18.2 (-61.4) | 0.0 (-75.0) |

Table 2: Long-term dialogue evaluation results. The total number of probing questions is 105, including Chinese and English, with 49 single-turn and 56 multi-turn related questions. The lower part of the table is the ablation experiment of our system.



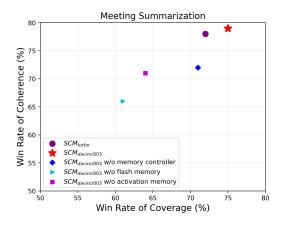


Figure 8: The win rate of SCM variants against baseline model, RecursiveSum (Wu et al., 2021) by OpenAI, in both book and meeting summarization tasks. The figure also shows a comparison of the results of the SCM system and its various component ablations.

- 2) SCM $_{\rm davinci003}$: Utilizing *text-davinci-003* as the backbone for SCM system.
- 3) SCM _{davinci003} *w/o* memory controller: Remove the memory controller and concatenate the full retrieved content. If the token length of the concatenated history exceeds 2500, truncate it.
- 4) SCM _{davinci003} *w/o* flash memory: Remove the flash memory (short-term memory), which contains the latest information.
- 5) SCM _{davinci003} *w/o* activation memory: Remove the activation memory (long-term memory), which is essential for answering questions involving long-distance dependencies.

Evaluation Metrics Distinct evaluation metrics are utilized for long-term dialogue scenario and two summarization scenario. For long-term dialogue scenario, the performance of our system is assessed based on the following metrics. (1) Answer Accuracy: Evaluates the accuracy of answers to probing questions. (2) Memory Retrieval Recall: Determines if related memory can be successfully retrieved by memory controller. (3) Single Turn Accuracy: Examines the accuracy of answers

to probing questions related to individual turns in the conversation history. (4) Multi Turn Accuracy: Similar to single-turn accuracy, but it requires considering the multi-turn history in order to answer these probing questions. Additionally, two metrics, coverage and coherence, are used to evaluate content coverage and plot coherence in summarization tasks. To facilitate a comprehensive comparison, we assess the effectiveness of the model by comparing its win rate to that of the baseline model, namely RecursiveSum (Wu et al., 2021) by OpenAI, which first summarizes small sections of the book and then recursively summarizes these summaries to produce a summary of the entire book.

Dialogue Results Table 2 displays the long-term dialogue results and demonstrates that the SCM davinci003 is superior to the SCM turbo for this particular task. This may be attributed to the SCM turbo's conservative nature, which can lead to hesitation in answering privacy related probing questions. In contrast, the SCM davinci003 is capable of providing quicker and more precise responses. Moreover, we conducted an ablation study to investigate the in-



Figure 9: Long-term dialogue example. To answer users' questions, our model can accurately retrieve relevant memories from massive memories and generate accurate responses based on these memories.

dependent effect of each module in SCM system, the results are illustrated in the lower part of Table 2. When the activation memory is removed, the accuracy of the system's responses experiences a significant drop, resulting in an approximate 60% decrease in performance. This is because the majority of probing questions are derived from longdistance dialogue records, which rely on activation memory to retrieve them. What's more, in the absence of activation memory, both memory retrieval recall and multi-turn accuracy have decreased to zero. This further demonstrates the significance of activation memory. However, when flash memory is removed, the performance only experienced a slight drop. This is because flash memory provides fewer clues to answer probing questions, resulting in a minor impact on the final accuracy. Removing the memory controller leads to a greater drop in accuracy for multi-turn related questions compared to single-turn questions. This is because the absence of the memory controller's dynamic memory filtering and use of summaries for efficient input token management results in the concatenation and truncation of all retrieved memories, leading to significant information loss.

Summarization Results Figure 8 illustrates the book and meeting summarization results. Based on the experimental results, we have obtained three conclusions: (1) SCM _{davinci003} provides better coverage than SCM _{turbo}. (2) SCM _{davinci003} and

SCM _{turbo} demonstrate comparable coherence performance due to their memory-enhanced mechanism. (3) The SCM system without memory loses contextual dependency and consequently produces unsatisfactory summarization outcomes. It is evident from the model comparison results that SCM _{davinci003} consistently outperforms SCM _{turbo} summarizing both books and meetings. This can be attributed to the fact that SCM _{turbo}'s summarization primarily focuses on general principles, whereas it overlooks detailed core plots. In terms of human evaluation, the SCM _{davinci003} model's results are more favored because of their conciseness, clarity, and richer plot content.

3.3 Qualitative Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to answer three research questions (RQs). The following experiment evaluates the performance of the SCM davinci003 model without dialogue optimization in comparison to the vanilla ChatGPT model.

RQ1. Can SCM system compete with or even outperform ChatGPT within a specific token limit? **Yes**.

The example in Figure 1 includes 4k tokens, wherein the user inquired about their hobbies, discussed 100+ turns ago with the agent. The SCM system provides an accurate response to the query, demonstrating exceptional memory-enhanced capabilities, as apparent from the observation. In

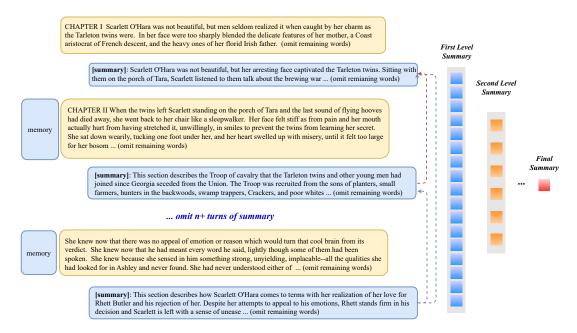


Figure 10: Ultra-long book iterative and hierarchical summarization example from *Gone With The Wind*. Our SCM system initially divides the long text into small text blocks, and then summarize each small text block in sequence. While summarizing the current text block, we will retrieve the flash memory and activation memories to ensure a smoother generation of the summary plot. We then proceed to hierarchically summarize the first level summary until reaching the final summary.

contrast, it appears that ChatGPT is distracted by a considerable amount of irrelevant historical noise.

RQ2. Can SCM system scale to provide accurate responses to users' questions, which are related to historical contexts that date back hundreds or even thousands of turns? **Yes**.

The example presented in Figure 9 illustrates a long-term dialogue comprising over 100 turns. At the outset, the user states that his goal is to reduce weight and intends to initiate a running regime. Subsequently, the user and the model converse daily about progress towards achieving their weight loss goals, among other conversation topics. After over 100 rounds of dialogue, the token length of the conversation has already exceeded 10k tokens. The user then asks the model "Do you remember my first sport?". Our SCM system recalls sports-related information from memory and combines it with the user's current question. Afterwards, the system generates an accurate response.

RQ3. Can SCM demonstrate effective generalization to other lengthy input scenarios?**Yes**.

Figure 10 illustrates an example of summarizing lengthy books and meetings with our SCM system in iterative and hierarchical manner. This lengthy document has been divided into several parts and

gradually summarized to obtain the first-level local summary, and then hierarchically summarized to obtain the final summary. In order to maintain context coherence, relevant memories from previous sections will be added to the input text. The conventional method involves dividing lengthy texts into separate smaller text blocks that can be processed by the model. and summarizing each text block independently. However, this method can lose the dependency relationship between paragraphs. Our SCM system facilitates the summarization process by utilizing the related memories, thus establishing substantial coherence between the two summaries. Ultimately, the framework incorporates a divide-and-conquer strategy to generate the final document summary. The final summary provides a comprehensive summary by utilizing information from each document block.

4 Related Work

Large-scale Language Models. Large-scale Language Models (LLMs) are language models trained on massive amounts of text data, using the Transformer (Vaswani et al., 2017) architecture as their foundation. The earliest Transformer-based pre-trained language model was GPT-1 (Radford et al., 2018), BERT (Devlin et al., 2019; Liang et al., 2023) and so on. Subsequently, GPT-2 (Rad-

ford et al., 2019) and GPT-3 (Brown et al., 2020b) were developed with gradually increasing parameter sizes. GPT-3 has the largest scale, with 175B parameters, along with emergent abilities (Wei et al., 2022b,c), which has attracted the attention of both academia and industry.

Since then, many LLMs have emerged, including LAMBDA (Thoppilan et al., 2022), PaLM (Chowdhery et al., 2022), OPT (Zhang et al., 2022a), LLaMA (Touvron et al., 2023), BLOOM (Workshop et al., 2023), and Qwen (Bai et al., 2023c). One of the most notable works is ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2022), which has achieved remarkable performance and surpassed the boundaries between NLP tasks. However, current LLMs, including ChatGPT, face significant limitations when processing tasks involving extremely long inputs.

Long Text Sequence Processing. Handling long text sequences has been a persistent challenge in natural language processing tasks (Yang et al., 2020; Bai et al., 2023b; Wang et al., 2023; Pi et al., 2022; Bai et al., 2023a). Existing solutions primarily involve replacing the Attention structure during pre-training to reduce computational costs and expanding the pre-training sequence length (Beltagy et al., 2020; Zaheer et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2022; Phang et al., 2022; Dong et al., 2023). Another alternative approach (Press et al., 2022) uses special positional encoding during pre-training to enable the model to learn relative positions and handle longer input texts during inference. However, the generalizability of these methods and their impact on downstream tasks remain uncertain. In the field of long-text summarization, there are many effective methods. Hierarchical or iterative methods have been used by Wu et al. (2021); Zhang et al. (2022b); Cao and Wang (2022); Liang et al. (2022) to handle long texts by decomposing a complex problem into multiple sub-problems. However, these methods fail to capture the relationships among sub-problems.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we propose a Self-Controlled Memory (SCM) system to extend the input length of any LLMs to an unlimited length and effectively capture useful information from all historical information. This method does not require any training or modification of models. In addition, we annotate an evaluation dataset comprising three tasks. Experimental results demonstrate that SCM allows

LLMs, which are not optimized for multi-turn dialogue, to attain comparable multi-turn dialogue capabilities to ChatGPT, and outperform ChatGPT in long document summarization tasks.

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