

Lab Assignment: Find the Middle of a Singly Linked List

Problem Statement:

Given a singly linked list, write a function to find and return the middle element of the list. In case of an even number of nodes, return the *second middle node*. Students are required to **implement the optimized strategy**.

Discussion of Possible Approaches:

1. Naïve Approach (Two-Pass):

- First traverse the list to count the total number of nodes.
- Then traverse again to the node at position $\lceil n/2 \rceil$ (second middle if n is even).
- Time Complexity: $O(n)$, Space Complexity: $O(1)$.

2. Optimized Approach (Fast-Slow Pointers):

- Maintain two pointers: `slow` and `fast`.
- Move `slow` one step at a time and `fast` two steps at a time.
- When `fast` reaches the end, `slow` will be at the middle node.
- This works in a single traversal.
- Time Complexity: $O(n)$, Space Complexity: $O(1)$.

Function Signature to Implement:

```
int getMiddle(Node* head);
```

Examples:

- Input: 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5 Output: 3 (5 nodes, middle is node 3)
- Input: 10 → 20 → 30 → 40 → 50 → 60 Output: 40 (6 nodes, two middle nodes are 30 and 40; return the second: 40)