

TCSS 343 - Week 7

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August 30, 2018

Greedy Algorithms

“Finding a needle in a haystack is actually quite easy. It’s finding a very specific piece of hay in a haystack that happens to be hard.”

...

Avi Wigderson

0. With this problem I want to present a problem to you and ask you why the greedy algorithm fails.

Imagine we have a wizard that knows a few spells. Each spell has 3 attributes: Damage, cooldown time, and a cast time.

Cooldown time: the amount of time (t) it takes before being able to cast that spell again. A spell goes on “cooldown” the moment it begins casting.

Cast time: the amount of time (t) it takes to use a spell. While the wizard is casting something another spell cannot be cast and it cannot be canceled.

The question is: **How would you maximize damage given different sets of spells?**

It is easy to calculate the highest damage per cast time. But what about in situations where it is better to wait then to get “stuck” casting a low damage spell when a much higher one is available...for example consider the two sets of spells:

Chill Touch: 100 damage at a rate of 1 second per cast with a 10 second cooldown.

Mage Hand. 10 damage at a rate of 4 second per cast with a 0 second cooldown.

Optimal spell ordering $\Sigma = \{\text{Chill Touch, Mage Hand, Wait, Repeat}\}$

0. Given an arbitrary amount of time t what is the maximum amount of spells we can cast S ?

Now imagine that there is one spell, henceforth called the Eldritch Blast, which does a very, very large amount of damage, has 0 casting time, and has some positive cooldown n . If all the other spells do much less damage than the Eldritch Blast, it will clearly be optimal to cast the Eldritch Blast every n seconds and then optimize the cooldown time with the weaker spells.

1. Why does the greedy algorithm work in this case?

Now, assume all the other spells also have cooldown n . If one optimizes a given n -second downtime with these spells, then the same spell-sequence will also be possible in the next n -second downtime, and so we can assume the solution is n -periodic.

2. Why does the greedy algorithm work in this case?

3. Would you say this problem is NP-Complete? NP-Complete problems have the highest complexity of any problem in NP, which are the class of problems which can be quickly checked to be true.

For this problem and many problems, we can abstract out the details like we just did and reduce the problem to its key constituent parts. When you employ this design technique you'll begin to notice that many problems you have reduce to problems to classes of problems. This is the most powerful design technique I know of when it comes to algorithms.

4. Of the problems you've covered in class, which does this problem degenerate too? Describe for which cases this problems degrenates to that problem you've already covered.