

3

Brute Force and Exhaustive Search

Science is as far removed from brute force as this sword from a crowbar.

—Edward Lytton (1803–1873), *Leila*, Book II, Chapter I

Doing a thing well is often a waste of time.

—Robert Byrne, a master pool and billiards player and a writer

After introducing the framework and methods for algorithm analysis in the preceding chapter, we are ready to embark on a discussion of algorithm design strategies. Each of the next eight chapters is devoted to a particular design strategy. The subject of this chapter is brute force and its important special case, exhaustive search. Brute force can be described as follows:

Brute force is a straightforward approach to solving a problem, usually directly based on the problem statement and definitions of the concepts involved.

The “force” implied by the strategy’s definition is that of a computer and not that of one’s intellect. “Just do it!” would be another way to describe the prescription of the brute-force approach. And often, the brute-force strategy is indeed the one that is easiest to apply.

As an example, consider the exponentiation problem: compute a^n for a nonzero number a and a nonnegative integer n . Although this problem might seem trivial, it provides a useful vehicle for illustrating several algorithm design strategies, including the brute force. (Also note that computing $a^n \bmod m$ for some large integers is a principal component of a leading encryption algorithm.) By the definition of exponentiation,

$$a^n = \underbrace{a * \cdots * a}_{n \text{ times}}.$$

This suggests simply computing a^n by multiplying 1 by a n times.

We have already encountered at least two brute-force algorithms in the book: the consecutive integer checking algorithm for computing $\text{gcd}(m, n)$ in Section 1.1 and the definition-based algorithm for matrix multiplication in Section 2.3. Many other examples are given later in this chapter. (Can you identify a few algorithms you already know as being based on the brute-force approach?)

Though rarely a source of clever or efficient algorithms, the brute-force approach should not be overlooked as an important algorithm design strategy. First, unlike some of the other strategies, brute force is applicable to a very wide variety of problems. In fact, it seems to be the only general approach for which it is more difficult to point out problems it *cannot* tackle. Second, for some important problems—e.g., sorting, searching, matrix multiplication, string matching—the brute-force approach yields reasonable algorithms of at least some practical value with no limitation on instance size. Third, the expense of designing a more efficient algorithm may be unjustifiable if only a few instances of a problem need to be solved and a brute-force algorithm can solve those instances with acceptable speed. Fourth, even if too inefficient in general, a brute-force algorithm can still be useful for solving small-size instances of a problem. Finally, a brute-force algorithm can serve an important theoretical or educational purpose as a yardstick with which to judge more efficient alternatives for solving a problem.

3.1 Selection Sort and Bubble Sort

In this section, we consider the application of the brute-force approach to the problem of sorting: given a list of n orderable items (e.g., numbers, characters from some alphabet, character strings), rearrange them in nondecreasing order. As we mentioned in Section 1.3, dozens of algorithms have been developed for solving this very important problem. You might have learned several of them in the past. If you have, try to forget them for the time being and look at the problem afresh.

Now, after your mind is unburdened of previous knowledge of sorting algorithms, ask yourself a question: “What would be the most straightforward method for solving the sorting problem?” Reasonable people may disagree on the answer to this question. The two algorithms discussed here—selection sort and bubble sort—seem to be the two prime candidates.

Selection Sort

We start selection sort by scanning the entire given list to find its smallest element and exchange it with the first element, putting the smallest element in its final position in the sorted list. Then we scan the list, starting with the second element, to find the smallest among the last $n - 1$ elements and exchange it with the second element, putting the second smallest element in its final position. Generally, on the

i th pass through the list, which we number from 0 to $n - 2$, the algorithm searches for the smallest item among the last $n - i$ elements and swaps it with A_i :

$$A_0 \leq A_1 \leq \dots \leq A_{i-1} \quad \Bigg| \quad \overbrace{A_i, \dots, A_{\min}, \dots, A_{n-1}}^{\text{the last } n-i \text{ elements}}$$

in their final positions

After $n - 1$ passes, the list is sorted.

Here is pseudocode of this algorithm, which, for simplicity, assumes that the list is implemented as an array:

ALGORITHM *SelectionSort*($A[0..n - 1]$)

//Sorts a given array by selection sort

//Input: An array $A[0..n - 1]$ of orderable elements

//Output: Array $A[0..n - 1]$ sorted in nondecreasing order

for $i \leftarrow 0$ **to** $n - 2$ **do**

$\min \leftarrow i$

for $j \leftarrow i + 1$ **to** $n - 1$ **do**

if $A[j] < A[\min]$ $\min \leftarrow j$

 swap $A[i]$ and $A[\min]$

As an example, the action of the algorithm on the list 89, 45, 68, 90, 29, 34, 17 is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

The analysis of selection sort is straightforward. The input size is given by the number of elements n ; the basic operation is the key comparison $A[j] < A[\min]$. The number of times it is executed depends only on the array size and is given by the following sum:

$$C(n) = \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} \sum_{j=i+1}^{n-1} 1 = \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} [(n-1) - (i+1) + 1] = \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} (n-1-i).$$

	89	45	68	90	29	34	17
17	45	68	90	29	34	89	
17	29	68	90	45	34	89	
17	29	34	90	45	68	89	
17	29	34	45	90	68	89	
17	29	34	45	68	90	89	
17	29	34	45	68	89	90	

FIGURE 3.1 Example of sorting with selection sort. Each line corresponds to one iteration of the algorithm, i.e., a pass through the list's tail to the right of the vertical bar; an element in bold indicates the smallest element found. Elements to the left of the vertical bar are in their final positions and are not considered in this and subsequent iterations.

Since we have already encountered the last sum in analyzing the algorithm of Example 2 in Section 2.3, you should be able to compute it now on your own. Whether you compute this sum by distributing the summation symbol or by immediately getting the sum of decreasing integers, the answer, of course, must be the same:

$$C(n) = \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} \sum_{j=i+1}^{n-1} 1 = \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} (n-1-i) = \frac{(n-1)n}{2}.$$

Thus, selection sort is a $\Theta(n^2)$ algorithm on all inputs. Note, however, that the number of key swaps is only $\Theta(n)$, or, more precisely, $n-1$ (one for each repetition of the i loop). This property distinguishes selection sort positively from many other sorting algorithms.

Bubble Sort

Another brute-force application to the sorting problem is to compare adjacent elements of the list and exchange them if they are out of order. By doing it repeatedly, we end up “bubbling up” the largest element to the last position on the list. The next pass bubbles up the second largest element, and so on, until after $n-1$ passes the list is sorted. Pass i ($0 \leq i \leq n-2$) of bubble sort can be represented by the following diagram:

$$A_0, \dots, A_j \overset{?}{\leftrightarrow} A_{j+1}, \dots, A_{n-i-1} \mid \underset{\text{in their final positions}}{A_{n-i} \leq \dots \leq A_{n-1}}$$

Here is pseudocode of this algorithm.

ALGORITHM *BubbleSort*($A[0..n-1]$)

```
//Sorts a given array by bubble sort
//Input: An array  $A[0..n-1]$  of orderable elements
//Output: Array  $A[0..n-1]$  sorted in nondecreasing order
for  $i \leftarrow 0$  to  $n-2$  do
    for  $j \leftarrow 0$  to  $n-2-i$  do
        if  $A[j+1] < A[j]$  swap  $A[j]$  and  $A[j+1]$ 
```

The action of the algorithm on the list 89, 45, 68, 90, 29, 34, 17 is illustrated as an example in Figure 3.2.

The number of key comparisons for the bubble-sort version given above is the same for all arrays of size n ; it is obtained by a sum that is almost identical to the sum for selection sort:

89	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	45		68		90		29		34		17
45		89	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	68		90		29		34		17
45		68		89	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	90	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	29		34		17
45		68		89		29		90	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	34		17
45		68		89		29		34		90	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	17
45		68		89		29		34		17		90
45	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	68	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	89	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	29		34		17		90
45		68		29		89	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	34		17		90
45		68		29		34		89	$\overset{?}{\leftrightarrow}$	17		90
45		68		29		34		17		89		90
etc.												

FIGURE 3.2 First two passes of bubble sort on the list 89, 45, 68, 90, 29, 34, 17. A new line is shown after a swap of two elements is done. The elements to the right of the vertical bar are in their final positions and are not considered in subsequent iterations of the algorithm.

$$\begin{aligned}
 C(n) &= \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} \sum_{j=0}^{n-2-i} 1 = \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} [(n-2-i) - 0 + 1] \\
 &= \sum_{i=0}^{n-2} (n-1-i) = \frac{(n-1)n}{2} \in \Theta(n^2).
 \end{aligned}$$

The number of key swaps, however, depends on the input. In the worst case of decreasing arrays, it is the same as the number of key comparisons:

$$S_{worst}(n) = C(n) = \frac{(n-1)n}{2} \in \Theta(n^2).$$

As is often the case with an application of the brute-force strategy, the first version of an algorithm obtained can often be improved upon with a modest amount of effort. Specifically, we can improve the crude version of bubble sort given above by exploiting the following observation: if a pass through the list makes no exchanges, the list has been sorted and we can stop the algorithm (Problem 12a in this section's exercises). Though the new version runs faster on some inputs, it is still in $\Theta(n^2)$ in the worst and average cases. In fact, even among elementary sorting methods, bubble sort is an inferior choice, and if it were not for its catchy name, you would probably have never heard of it. However, the general lesson you just learned is important and worth repeating:

A first application of the brute-force approach often results in an algorithm that can be improved with a modest amount of effort.

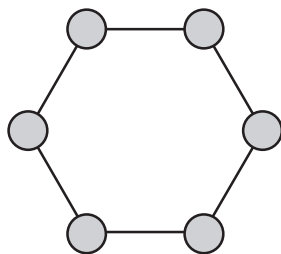
Exercises 3.1

1.
 - a. Give an example of an algorithm that should not be considered an application of the brute-force approach.
 - b. Give an example of a problem that cannot be solved by a brute-force algorithm.
2.
 - a. What is the time efficiency of the brute-force algorithm for computing a^n as a function of n ? As a function of the number of bits in the binary representation of n ?
 - b. If you are to compute $a^n \bmod m$ where $a > 1$ and n is a large positive integer, how would you circumvent the problem of a very large magnitude of a^n ?
3. For each of the algorithms in Problems 4, 5, and 6 of Exercises 2.3, tell whether or not the algorithm is based on the brute-force approach.
4.
 - a. Design a brute-force algorithm for computing the value of a polynomial

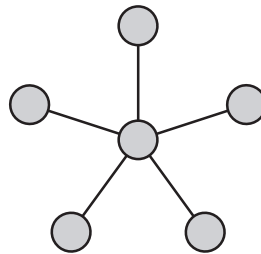
$$p(x) = a_n x^n + a_{n-1} x^{n-1} + \cdots + a_1 x + a_0$$

at a given point x_0 and determine its worst-case efficiency class.

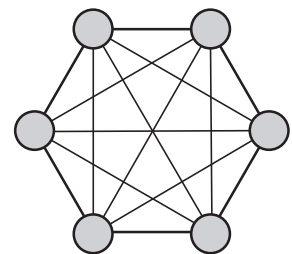
- b. If the algorithm you designed is in $\Theta(n^2)$, design a linear algorithm for this problem.
 - c. Is it possible to design an algorithm with a better-than-linear efficiency for this problem?
5. A network topology specifies how computers, printers, and other devices are connected over a network. The figure below illustrates three common topologies of networks: the ring, the star, and the fully connected mesh.



ring



star

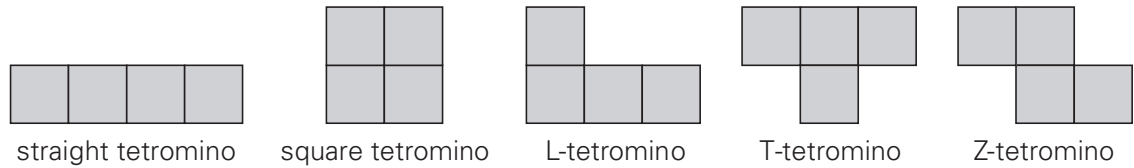


fully connected mesh

You are given a boolean matrix $A[0..n-1, 0..n-1]$, where $n > 3$, which is supposed to be the adjacency matrix of a graph modeling a network with one of these topologies. Your task is to determine which of these three topologies, if any, the matrix represents. Design a brute-force algorithm for this task and indicate its time efficiency class.



6. *Tetromino tilings* Tetrominoes are tiles made of four 1×1 squares. There are five types of tetrominoes shown below:



Is it possible to tile—i.e., cover exactly without overlaps—an 8×8 chessboard with

- a. straight tetrominoes? b. square tetrominoes?
- c. L-tetrominoes? d. T-tetrominoes?
- e. Z-tetrominoes?



7. *A stack of fake coins* There are n stacks of n identical-looking coins. All of the coins in one of these stacks are counterfeit, while all the coins in the other stacks are genuine. Every genuine coin weighs 10 grams; every fake weighs 11 grams. You have an analytical scale that can determine the exact weight of any number of coins.
 - a. Devise a brute-force algorithm to identify the stack with the fake coins and determine its worst-case efficiency class.
 - b. What is the minimum number of weighings needed to identify the stack with the fake coins?
8. Sort the list E, X, A, M, P, L, E in alphabetical order by selection sort.
9. Is selection sort stable? (The definition of a stable sorting algorithm was given in Section 1.3.)
10. Is it possible to implement selection sort for linked lists with the same $\Theta(n^2)$ efficiency as the array version?
11. Sort the list E, X, A, M, P, L, E in alphabetical order by bubble sort.
12. a. Prove that if bubble sort makes no exchanges on its pass through a list, the list is sorted and the algorithm can be stopped.
 b. Write pseudocode of the method that incorporates this improvement.
 c. Prove that the worst-case efficiency of the improved version is quadratic.
13. Is bubble sort stable?



14. *Alternating disks* You have a row of $2n$ disks of two colors, n dark and n light. They alternate: dark, light, dark, light, and so on. You want to get all the dark disks to the right-hand end, and all the light disks to the left-hand end. The only moves you are allowed to make are those that interchange the positions of two neighboring disks.



Design an algorithm for solving this puzzle and determine the number of moves it takes. [Gar99]

3.2 Sequential Search and Brute-Force String Matching

We saw in the previous section two applications of the brute-force approach to the sorting problem. Here we discuss two applications of this strategy to the problem of searching. The first deals with the canonical problem of searching for an item of a given value in a given list. The second is different in that it deals with the string-matching problem.

Sequential Search

We have already encountered a brute-force algorithm for the general searching problem: it is called sequential search (see Section 2.1). To repeat, the algorithm simply compares successive elements of a given list with a given search key until either a match is encountered (successful search) or the list is exhausted without finding a match (unsuccessful search). A simple extra trick is often employed in implementing sequential search: if we append the search key to the end of the list, the search for the key will have to be successful, and therefore we can eliminate the end of list check altogether. Here is pseudocode of this enhanced version.

ALGORITHM *SequentialSearch2*($A[0..n]$, K)

```
//Implements sequential search with a search key as a sentinel
//Input: An array  $A$  of  $n$  elements and a search key  $K$ 
//Output: The index of the first element in  $A[0..n - 1]$  whose value is
//        equal to  $K$  or  $-1$  if no such element is found
 $A[n] \leftarrow K$ 
 $i \leftarrow 0$ 
while  $A[i] \neq K$  do
     $i \leftarrow i + 1$ 
if  $i < n$  return  $i$ 
else return  $-1$ 
```

Another straightforward improvement can be incorporated in sequential search if a given list is known to be sorted: searching in such a list can be stopped as soon as an element greater than or equal to the search key is encountered.

Sequential search provides an excellent illustration of the brute-force approach, with its characteristic strength (simplicity) and weakness (inferior efficiency). The efficiency results obtained in Section 2.1 for the standard version of sequential search change for the enhanced version only very slightly, so that the algorithm remains linear in both the worst and average cases. We discuss later in the book several searching algorithms with a better time efficiency.

Brute-Force String Matching

Recall the string-matching problem introduced in Section 1.3: given a string of n characters called the *text* and a string of m characters ($m \leq n$) called the *pattern*, find a substring of the text that matches the pattern. To put it more precisely, we want to find i —the index of the leftmost character of the first matching substring in the text—such that $t_i = p_0, \dots, t_{i+j} = p_j, \dots, t_{i+m-1} = p_{m-1}$:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccccccc}
 t_0 & \dots & t_i & \dots & t_{i+j} & \dots & t_{i+m-1} & \dots & t_{n-1} & \text{text } T \\
 & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & \downarrow & & & \\
 & & p_0 & \dots & p_j & \dots & p_{m-1} & \dots & & \text{pattern } P
 \end{array}$$

If matches other than the first one need to be found, a string-matching algorithm can simply continue working until the entire text is exhausted.

A brute-force algorithm for the string-matching problem is quite obvious: align the pattern against the first m characters of the text and start matching the corresponding pairs of characters from left to right until either all the m pairs of the characters match (then the algorithm can stop) or a mismatching pair is encountered. In the latter case, shift the pattern one position to the right and resume the character comparisons, starting again with the first character of the pattern and its counterpart in the text. Note that the last position in the text that can still be a beginning of a matching substring is $n - m$ (provided the text positions are indexed from 0 to $n - 1$). Beyond that position, there are not enough characters to match the entire pattern; hence, the algorithm need not make any comparisons there.

ALGORITHM *BruteForceStringMatch*($T[0..n - 1]$, $P[0..m - 1]$)

```

//Implements brute-force string matching
//Input: An array  $T[0..n - 1]$  of  $n$  characters representing a text and
//       an array  $P[0..m - 1]$  of  $m$  characters representing a pattern
//Output: The index of the first character in the text that starts a
//        matching substring or  $-1$  if the search is unsuccessful
for  $i \leftarrow 0$  to  $n - m$  do
     $j \leftarrow 0$ 
    while  $j < m$  and  $P[j] = T[i + j]$  do
         $j \leftarrow j + 1$ 
    if  $j = m$  return  $i$ 
return  $-1$ 

```

An operation of the algorithm is illustrated in Figure 3.3. Note that for this example, the algorithm shifts the pattern almost always after a single character comparison. The worst case is much worse: the algorithm may have to make all m comparisons before shifting the pattern, and this can happen for each of the $n - m + 1$ tries. (Problem 6 in this section's exercises asks you to give a specific example of such a situation.) Thus, in the worst case, the algorithm makes

```

N O B O D Y _ N O T I C E D _ H I M
N O T
  N O T
    N O T
      N O T
        N O T
          N O T
            N O T
              N O T
                N O T

```

FIGURE 3.3 Example of brute-force string matching. The pattern's characters that are compared with their text counterparts are in bold type.

$m(n - m + 1)$ character comparisons, which puts it in the $O(nm)$ class. For a typical word search in a natural language text, however, we should expect that most shifts would happen after very few comparisons (check the example again). Therefore, the average-case efficiency should be considerably better than the worst-case efficiency. Indeed it is: for searching in random texts, it has been shown to be linear, i.e., $\Theta(n)$. There are several more sophisticated and more efficient algorithms for string searching. The most widely known of them—by R. Boyer and J. Moore—is outlined in Section 7.2 along with its simplification suggested by R. Horspool.

Exercises 3.2

1. Find the number of comparisons made by the sentinel version of sequential search
 - a. in the worst case.
 - b. in the average case if the probability of a successful search is p ($0 \leq p \leq 1$).
2. As shown in Section 2.1, the average number of key comparisons made by sequential search (without a sentinel, under standard assumptions about its inputs) is given by the formula

$$C_{avg}(n) = \frac{p(n+1)}{2} + n(1-p),$$

where p is the probability of a successful search. Determine, for a fixed n , the values of p ($0 \leq p \leq 1$) for which this formula yields the maximum value of $C_{avg}(n)$ and the minimum value of $C_{avg}(n)$.



3. *Gadget testing* A firm wants to determine the highest floor of its n -story headquarters from which a gadget can fall without breaking. The firm has two identical gadgets to experiment with. If one of them gets broken, it cannot be repaired, and the experiment will have to be completed with the remaining gadget. Design an algorithm in the best efficiency class you can to solve this problem.

4. Determine the number of character comparisons made by the brute-force algorithm in searching for the pattern GANDHI in the text

THERE_IS_MORE_TO_LIFE_THAN_INCREASING_ITS_SPEED

Assume that the length of the text—it is 47 characters long—is known before the search starts.

5. How many comparisons (both successful and unsuccessful) will be made by the brute-force algorithm in searching for each of the following patterns in the binary text of one thousand zeros?

a. 00001 **b.** 10000 **c.** 01010

6. Give an example of a text of length n and a pattern of length m that constitutes a worst-case input for the brute-force string-matching algorithm. Exactly how many character comparisons will be made for such input?
7. In solving the string-matching problem, would there be any advantage in comparing pattern and text characters right-to-left instead of left-to-right?
8. Consider the problem of counting, in a given text, the number of substrings that start with an A and end with a B. For example, there are four such substrings in CABAAXBYA.
- a.** Design a brute-force algorithm for this problem and determine its efficiency class.
- b.** Design a more efficient algorithm for this problem. [Gin04]
9. Write a visualization program for the brute-force string-matching algorithm.



10. *Word Find* A popular diversion in the United States, “word find” (or “word search”) puzzles ask the player to find each of a given set of words in a square table filled with single letters. A word can read horizontally (left or right), vertically (up or down), or along a 45 degree diagonal (in any of the four directions) formed by consecutively adjacent cells of the table; it may wrap around the table’s boundaries, but it must read in the same direction with no zigzagging. The same cell of the table may be used in different words, but, in a given word, the same cell may be used no more than once. Write a computer program for solving this puzzle.



11. *Battleship game* Write a program based on a version of brute-force pattern matching for playing the game Battleship on the computer. The rules of the game are as follows. There are two opponents in the game (in this case, a human player and the computer). The game is played on two identical boards (10×10 tables of squares) on which each opponent places his or her ships, not seen by the opponent. Each player has five ships, each of which occupies a certain number of squares on the board: a destroyer (two squares), a submarine (three squares), a cruiser (three squares), a battleship (four squares), and an aircraft carrier (five squares). Each ship is placed either horizontally or vertically, with no two ships touching each other. The game is played by the opponents taking turns “shooting” at each other’s ships. The

result of every shot is displayed as either a hit or a miss. In case of a hit, the player gets to go again and keeps playing until missing. The goal is to sink all the opponent's ships before the opponent succeeds in doing it first. To sink a ship, all squares occupied by the ship must be hit.

3.3 Closest-Pair and Convex-Hull Problems by Brute Force

In this section, we consider a straightforward approach to two well-known problems dealing with a finite set of points in the plane. These problems, aside from their theoretical interest, arise in two important applied areas: computational geometry and operations research.

Closest-Pair Problem

The closest-pair problem calls for finding the two closest points in a set of n points. It is the simplest of a variety of problems in computational geometry that deals with proximity of points in the plane or higher-dimensional spaces. Points in question can represent such physical objects as airplanes or post offices as well as database records, statistical samples, DNA sequences, and so on. An air-traffic controller might be interested in two closest planes as the most probable collision candidates. A regional postal service manager might need a solution to the closest-pair problem to find candidate post-office locations to be closed.

One of the important applications of the closest-pair problem is cluster analysis in statistics. Based on n data points, hierarchical cluster analysis seeks to organize them in a hierarchy of clusters based on some similarity metric. For numerical data, this metric is usually the Euclidean distance; for text and other nonnumerical data, metrics such as the Hamming distance (see Problem 5 in this section's exercises) are used. A bottom-up algorithm begins with each element as a separate cluster and merges them into successively larger clusters by combining the closest pair of clusters.

For simplicity, we consider the two-dimensional case of the closest-pair problem. We assume that the points in question are specified in a standard fashion by their (x, y) Cartesian coordinates and that the distance between two points $p_i(x_i, y_i)$ and $p_j(x_j, y_j)$ is the standard Euclidean distance

$$d(p_i, p_j) = \sqrt{(x_i - x_j)^2 + (y_i - y_j)^2}.$$

The brute-force approach to solving this problem leads to the following obvious algorithm: compute the distance between each pair of distinct points and find a pair with the smallest distance. Of course, we do not want to compute the distance between the same pair of points twice. To avoid doing so, we consider only the pairs of points (p_i, p_j) for which $i < j$.

Pseudocode below computes the distance between the two closest points; getting the closest points themselves requires just a trivial modification.

ALGORITHM *BruteForceClosestPair(P)*

```
//Finds distance between two closest points in the plane by brute force
//Input: A list  $P$  of  $n$  ( $n \geq 2$ ) points  $p_1(x_1, y_1), \dots, p_n(x_n, y_n)$ 
//Output: The distance between the closest pair of points
 $d \leftarrow \infty$ 
for  $i \leftarrow 1$  to  $n - 1$  do
    for  $j \leftarrow i + 1$  to  $n$  do
         $d \leftarrow \min(d, \text{sqrt}((x_i - x_j)^2 + (y_i - y_j)^2))$  //sqrt is square root
return  $d$ 
```

The basic operation of the algorithm is computing the square root. In the age of electronic calculators with a square-root button, one might be led to believe that computing the square root is as simple an operation as, say, addition or multiplication. Of course, it is not. For starters, even for most integers, square roots are irrational numbers that therefore can be found only approximately. Moreover, computing such approximations is not a trivial matter. But, in fact, computing square roots in the loop can be avoided! (Can you think how?) The trick is to realize that we can simply ignore the square-root function and compare the values $(x_i - x_j)^2 + (y_i - y_j)^2$ themselves. We can do this because the smaller a number of which we take the square root, the smaller its square root, or, as mathematicians say, the square-root function is strictly increasing.

Then the basic operation of the algorithm will be squaring a number. The number of times it will be executed can be computed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} C(n) &= \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} \sum_{j=i+1}^n 2 = 2 \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} (n - i) \\ &= 2[(n - 1) + (n - 2) + \dots + 1] = (n - 1)n \in \Theta(n^2). \end{aligned}$$

Of course, speeding up the innermost loop of the algorithm could only decrease the algorithm's running time by a constant factor (see Problem 1 in this section's exercises), but it cannot improve its asymptotic efficiency class. In Chapter 5, we discuss a linearithmic algorithm for this problem, which is based on a more sophisticated design technique.

Convex-Hull Problem

On to the other problem—that of computing the convex hull. Finding the convex hull for a given set of points in the plane or a higher dimensional space is one of the most important—some people believe the most important—problems in computational geometry. This prominence is due to a variety of applications in which

this problem needs to be solved, either by itself or as a part of a larger task. Several such applications are based on the fact that convex hulls provide convenient approximations of object shapes and data sets given. For example, in computer animation, replacing objects by their convex hulls speeds up collision detection; the same idea is used in path planning for Mars mission rovers. Convex hulls are used in computing accessibility maps produced from satellite images by Geographic Information Systems. They are also used for detecting outliers by some statistical techniques. An efficient algorithm for computing a diameter of a set of points, which is the largest distance between two of the points, needs the set's convex hull to find the largest distance between two of its extreme points (see below). Finally, convex hulls are important for solving many optimization problems, because their extreme points provide a limited set of solution candidates.

We start with a definition of a convex set.

DEFINITION A set of points (finite or infinite) in the plane is called **convex** if for any two points p and q in the set, the entire line segment with the endpoints at p and q belongs to the set.

All the sets depicted in Figure 3.4a are convex, and so are a straight line, a triangle, a rectangle, and, more generally, any convex polygon,¹ a circle, and the entire plane. On the other hand, the sets depicted in Figure 3.4b, any finite set of two or more distinct points, the boundary of any convex polygon, and a circumference are examples of sets that are not convex.

Now we are ready for the notion of the convex hull. Intuitively, the convex hull of a set of n points in the plane is the smallest convex polygon that contains all of them either inside or on its boundary. If this formulation does not fire up your enthusiasm, consider the problem as one of barricading n sleeping tigers by a fence of the shortest length. This interpretation is due to D. Harel [Har92]; it is somewhat lively, however, because the fenceposts have to be erected right at the spots where some of the tigers sleep! There is another, much tamer interpretation of this notion. Imagine that the points in question are represented by nails driven into a large sheet of plywood representing the plane. Take a rubber band and stretch it to include all the nails, then let it snap into place. The convex hull is the area bounded by the snapped rubber band (Figure 3.5).

A formal definition of the convex hull that is applicable to arbitrary sets, including sets of points that happen to lie on the same line, follows.

DEFINITION The **convex hull** of a set S of points is the smallest convex set containing S . (The “smallest” requirement means that the convex hull of S must be a subset of any convex set containing S .)

If S is convex, its convex hull is obviously S itself. If S is a set of two points, its convex hull is the line segment connecting these points. If S is a set of three

1. By “a triangle, a rectangle, and, more generally, any convex polygon,” we mean here a region, i.e., the set of points both inside and on the boundary of the shape in question.

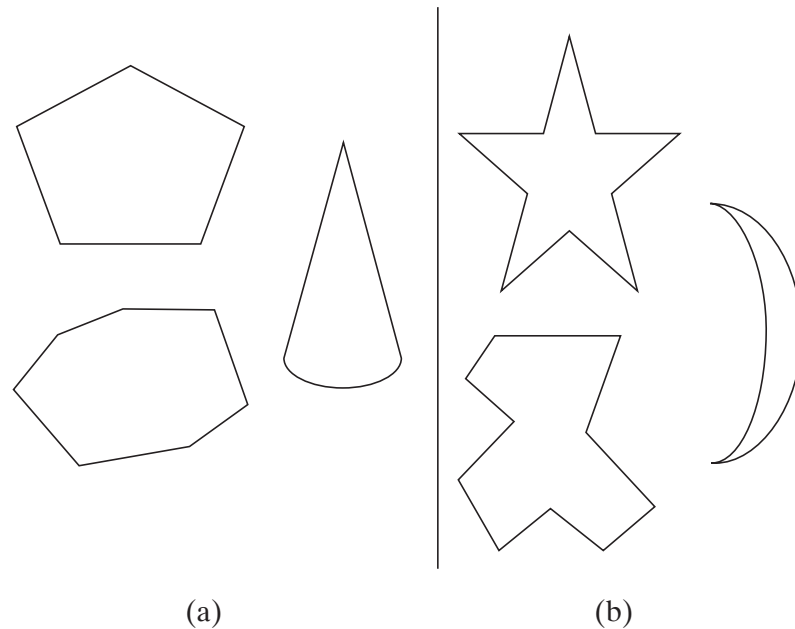


FIGURE 3.4 (a) Convex sets. (b) Sets that are not convex.

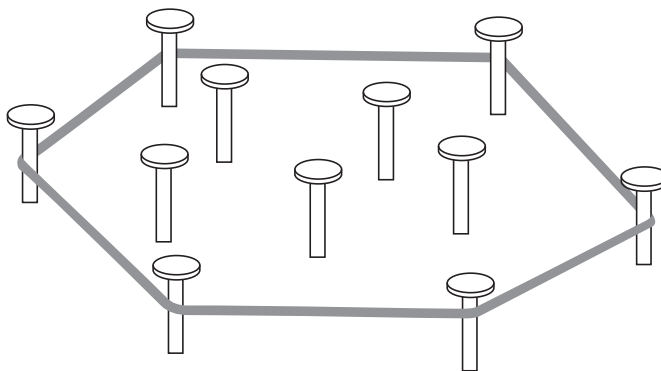


FIGURE 3.5 Rubber-band interpretation of the convex hull.

points not on the same line, its convex hull is the triangle with the vertices at the three points given; if the three points do lie on the same line, the convex hull is the line segment with its endpoints at the two points that are farthest apart. For an example of the convex hull for a larger set, see Figure 3.6.

A study of the examples makes the following theorem an expected result.

THEOREM The convex hull of any set S of $n > 2$ points not all on the same line is a convex polygon with the vertices at some of the points of S . (If all the points do lie on the same line, the polygon degenerates to a line segment but still with the endpoints at two points of S .)

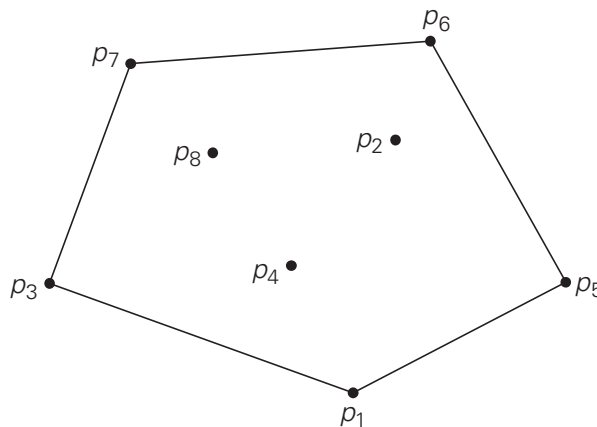


FIGURE 3.6 The convex hull for this set of eight points is the convex polygon with vertices at p_1 , p_5 , p_6 , p_7 , and p_3 .

The **convex-hull problem** is the problem of constructing the convex hull for a given set S of n points. To solve it, we need to find the points that will serve as the vertices of the polygon in question. Mathematicians call the vertices of such a polygon “extreme points.” By definition, an **extreme point** of a convex set is a point of this set that is not a middle point of any line segment with endpoints in the set. For example, the extreme points of a triangle are its three vertices, the extreme points of a circle are all the points of its circumference, and the extreme points of the convex hull of the set of eight points in Figure 3.6 are p_1 , p_5 , p_6 , p_7 , and p_3 .

Extreme points have several special properties other points of a convex set do not have. One of them is exploited by the **simplex method**, a very important algorithm discussed in Section 10.1. This algorithm solves **linear programming** problems, which are problems of finding a minimum or a maximum of a linear function of n variables subject to linear constraints (see Problem 12 in this section’s exercises for an example and Sections 6.6 and 10.1 for a general discussion). Here, however, we are interested in extreme points because their identification solves the convex-hull problem. Actually, to solve this problem completely, we need to know a bit more than just which of n points of a given set are extreme points of the set’s convex hull: we need to know which pairs of points need to be connected to form the boundary of the convex hull. Note that this issue can also be addressed by listing the extreme points in a clockwise or a counterclockwise order.

So how can we solve the convex-hull problem in a brute-force manner? If you do not see an immediate plan for a frontal attack, do not be dismayed: the convex-hull problem is one with no obvious algorithmic solution. Nevertheless, there is a simple but inefficient algorithm that is based on the following observation about line segments making up the boundary of a convex hull: a line segment connecting two points p_i and p_j of a set of n points is a part of the convex hull’s boundary if and

only if all the other points of the set lie on the same side of the straight line through these two points.² (Verify this property for the set in Figure 3.6.) Repeating this test for every pair of points yields a list of line segments that make up the convex hull's boundary.

A few elementary facts from analytical geometry are needed to implement this algorithm. First, the straight line through two points (x_1, y_1) , (x_2, y_2) in the coordinate plane can be defined by the equation

$$ax + by = c,$$

where $a = y_2 - y_1$, $b = x_1 - x_2$, $c = x_1y_2 - y_1x_2$.

Second, such a line divides the plane into two half-planes: for all the points in one of them, $ax + by > c$, while for all the points in the other, $ax + by < c$. (For the points on the line itself, of course, $ax + by = c$.) Thus, to check whether certain points lie on the same side of the line, we can simply check whether the expression $ax + by - c$ has the same sign for each of these points. We leave the implementation details as an exercise.

What is the time efficiency of this algorithm? It is in $O(n^3)$: for each of $n(n-1)/2$ pairs of distinct points, we may need to find the sign of $ax + by - c$ for each of the other $n-2$ points. There are much more efficient algorithms for this important problem, and we discuss one of them later in the book.

Exercises 3.3

1. Assuming that *sqrt* takes about 10 times longer than each of the other operations in the innermost loop of *BruteForceClosestPoints*, which are assumed to take the same amount of time, estimate how much faster the algorithm will run after the improvement discussed in Section 3.3.
2. Can you design a more efficient algorithm than the one based on the brute-force strategy to solve the closest-pair problem for n points x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n on the real line?
3. Let $x_1 < x_2 < \dots < x_n$ be real numbers representing coordinates of n villages located along a straight road. A post office needs to be built in one of these villages.
 - a. Design an efficient algorithm to find the post-office location minimizing the average distance between the villages and the post office.
 - b. Design an efficient algorithm to find the post-office location minimizing the maximum distance from a village to the post office.

2. For the sake of simplicity, we assume here that no three points of a given set lie on the same line. A modification needed for the general case is left for the exercises.