

Greedy algorithms determine minimum number of coins to give while [making change](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Change-making_problem). These are the steps a human would take to emulate a greedy algorithm to represent 36 cents using only coins with values {1, 5, 10, 20}. The coin of the highest value, less than the remaining change owed, is the local optimum.

making the locally optimal choice at each stage

Greedy algorithms mostly (but not always) fail to find the globally optimal solution, because they usually do not operate exhaustively on all the data. They can make commitments to certain choices too early which prevent them from finding the best overall solution later. For example, all known greedy coloring algorithms for the graph coloring problem and all other NP-complete problems do not consistently find optimum solutions. Nevertheless, they are useful because they are quick to think up and often give good approximations to the optimum.