Lecture 9: Priority Queues and Heaps

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September 23, 2025 601.433/633 Introduction to Algorithms

Introduction

Priority Queues / Heaps: Like a queue/stack, but instead of FIFO/LIFO, by priority

- ▶ Insert(H, x): insert element x into heap H.
- Extract-Min(H): remove and return an element with smallest key
- ▶ Decrease-Key(H, x, k): decrease the key of x to k.
- lacktriangle Meld(H_1, H_2): replace heaps H_1 and H_2 with their union

Extra Operations:

- Find-Min(**H**): return the element with smallest key
- ightharpoonup Delete(H, x): delete element x from heap H

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Note: x is a *pointer* to an element. No way to lookup, so need a pointer to an element to change it.

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No! Sorting lower bound. But maybe can make one O(1), other $O(\log n)$?

Today and State of the Art

State of the art: strict Fibonacci Heaps.

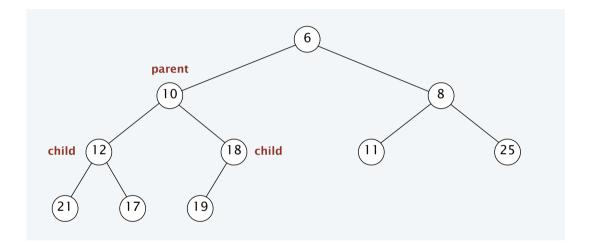
▶ Too complicated for this class, not practical. See CLRS 19 for Fibonacci Heaps.

Today: binary heaps (should be review), then binomial heaps

▶ Binomial heaps not quite as complicated as Fibonacci heaps, many of same core ideas

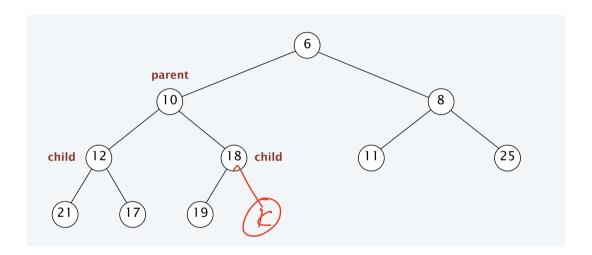
Binary Heaps

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- ▶ Heap order: key of any node no larger than key of its children.



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Properties:

- Since (almost) complete binary tree, depth $\Theta(\log n)$
- Min must be at root

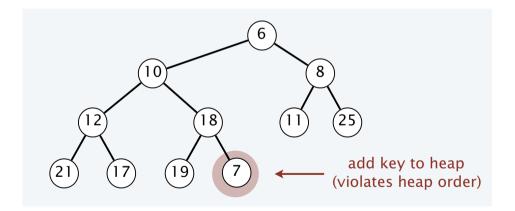
Representation:

- Pointers to root and rightmost leaf
- Every node has pointers to parent and children

Insert(H, x)

Preserve heap *structure*: insert *x* into next open spot (bottom right, or left of new level if bottom level full)

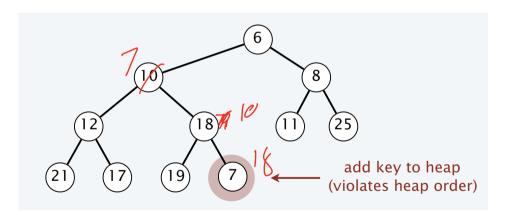
► Might violate heap *order*!



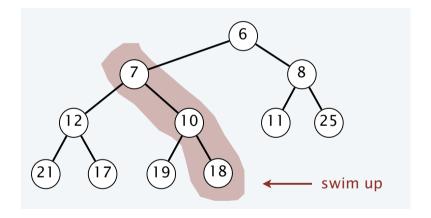
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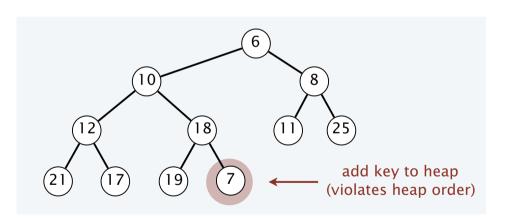
"Swim up": as long as x smaller than its parent, swap with parent



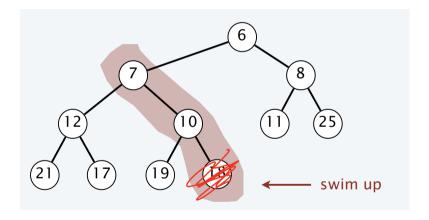
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Running time: $O(\log n)$ worst case (also amortized) via depth

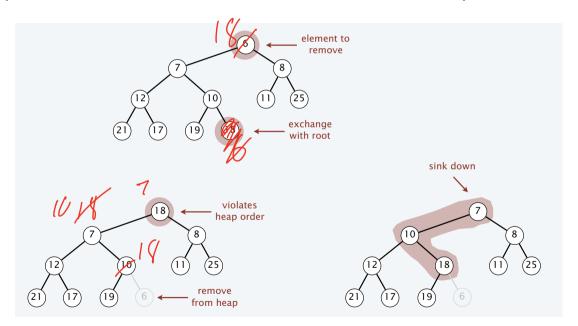
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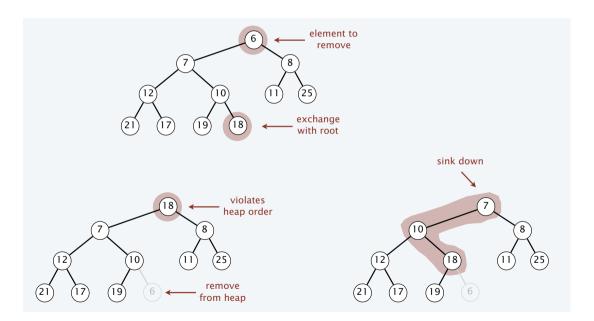
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- Sink down: swap root with smaller of its children until heap order restored



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Running time: $O(\log n)$ worst case (via depth). Amortized: O(1) (not obvious)

Decrease-Key(H, x, k)

Decrease key of x to k, "swim up" until heap order restored.

Running time: $O(\log n)$ (depth)

Assume both heaps have size n.

▶ Obvious approach: insert each element of H_2 into H_1 . Time: $O(n \log n)$

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 - At most $n/2^h$ nodes at height h

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$$\sum_{h=0}^{\log n} h\left(\frac{n}{2^h}\right) = n \sum_{h=0}^{\log n} \frac{h}{2^h} \le O(n)$$

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Extract-Min:

- ▶ True cost: height $h = \Theta(\log n)$ of tree, plus O(1) (for initial swap).
- ▶ $\Delta \Phi$: one less node at depth $h \implies \Delta \Phi = -h$
- Amortized cost: h + O(1) h = O(1).

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Uses Inserts to "pay for" Extract-Mins.

Improvements

Downsides of binary heaps:

- ▶ Do at least as many Inserts as Extract-Mins! Want O(1) Insert, $O(\log n)$ Extract-Min
- ightharpoonup Meld in O(n) is better than trivial, but still not great.

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Binomial Heaps:

- Get Insert down to O(1) (amortized)
- ▶ Meld in $O(\log n)$ (worst-case and amortized)
- ▶ Downside: $O(\log n)$ Extract-Min, $O(\log n)$ Find-Min

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Fibonacci Heaps:

• Everything O(1) (amortized) except $O(\log n)$ Extract-Min (amortized)

Binomial Heaps

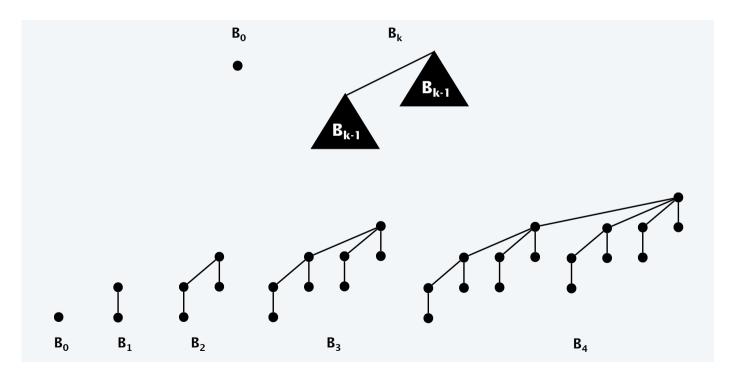
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- ▶ B_0 = single node.
- ▶ B_k = one B_{k-1} linked to another B_{k-1} .

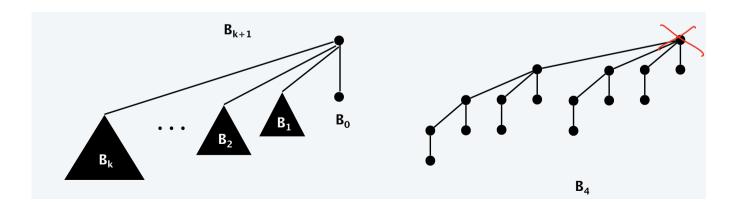


Structure Lemma

Lemma

The order k binomial tree B_k has the following properties:

- 1. Its height is k.
- 2. It has 2^k nodes
- 3. The degree of the root is k
- 4. If we delete the root, we get k binomial trees B_{k-1}, \ldots, B_0 .

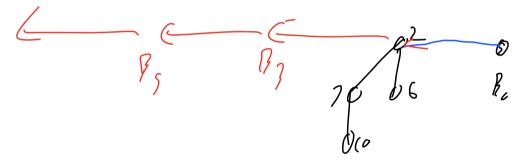


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Definition

A binomial heap is a collection of binomial trees so that each tree is heap ordered, and there is exactly $\mathbf{0}$ or $\mathbf{1}$ tree of order \mathbf{k} for each integer \mathbf{k} .

Keep roots of trees in linked list, from smallest order (not key!) to largest

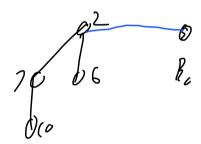


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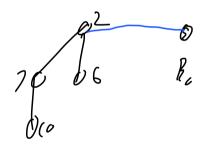
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- \implies at most $\log n$ trees, and by lemma each has height $\leq \log n$

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- Correct: each tree heap-ordered, so global min one of the roots
- Worst-case: $O(\log n)$
- ▶ Amortized: doesn't change potential, also $O(\log n)$.

Key operation: we'll use Meld to do Insert and Extract-Min

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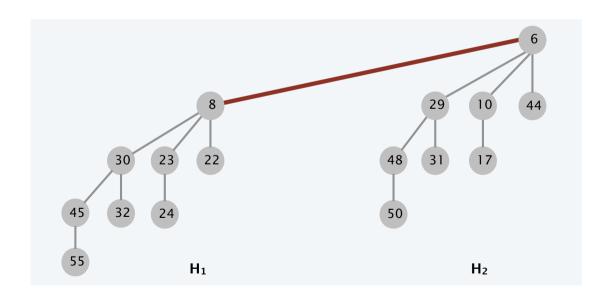
Warmup: H_1, H_2 both single trees of same order k.

- ▶ Union has size $2^k + 2^k = 2^{k+1}$: just a single B_{k+1}
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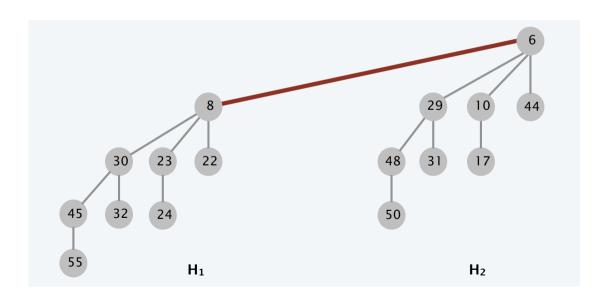
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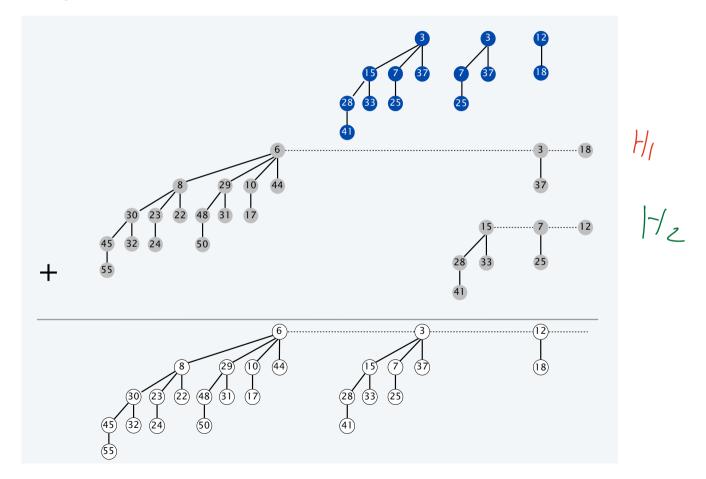
Link of two trees.

- Worst-case time: O(1) (create a single link). Normalize: call 1
- $\triangleright \Delta \Phi$: two trees to one: -1
- Amortized cost:

$$1-1=0=O(1)$$
.

$Meld(H_1, H_2)$: General Case

(Almost) just like binary addition!



$Meld(H_1, H_2)$: Analysis

Easy to prove correct (exercise for home).

Running time:

- ▶ Worst case: O(1) per "order" $k \implies \le O(\log n)$
- Amortized: Potential does not go up, but could stay the same $\Longrightarrow O(\log n)$ amortized

Use Meld:

- Create new heap H' with one B_0 consisting of just x
- ► Meld(*H*, *H*′)

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Running Time:

- Worst case: $O(\log n)$ (via Meld)
- Amortized:
 - Like incrementing a binary counter!
 - If we link k trees, potential goes down by k-1
 - Cost = # links plus **1** (for making new heap)
 - Amortized cost = $k + 1 + \Delta \Phi = k + 1 (k 1) = 2 = O(1)$

Extract-Min(*H*)

Use Meld again!

- $ightharpoonup O(\log n)$ to Find-Min: one of the roots.
- Delete and return this root: tree turns into a new heap!
- Meld with original heap (minus the tree)

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Correctness: Obvious

Running Time:

- Worst-Case: $O(\log n)$ from creating new heap, Meld
- Amortized:
 - Potential can go up! But by at most log n
 - Amortized time at most $O(\log n) + \log n = O(\log n)$