Stacks and Queues

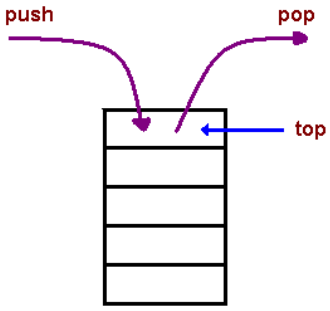
An array is a *random access* data structure, where each element can be accessed directly and in constant time. A typical illustration of random access is a book - each page of the book can be open independently of others. Random access is critical to many algorithms, for example binary search.

A linked list is a *sequential access* data structure, where each element can be accesed only in particular order. A typical illustration of sequential access is a roll of paper or tape - all prior material must be unrolled in order to get to data you want.

In this note we consider a subcase of sequential data structures, so-called *limited access* data sturctures.

Stacks

A stack is a container of objects that are inserted and removed according to the last-in first-out (LIFO) principle. In the pushdown stacks only two operations are allowed: **push** the item into the stack, and **pop** the item out of the stack. A stack is a limited access data structure - elements can be added and removed from the stack only at the top. **push** adds an item to the top of the stack, **pop** removes the item from the top. A helpful analogy is to think of a stack of books; you can remove only the top book, also you can add a new book on the top.

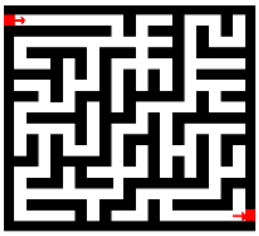


A stack is a **recursive** data structure. Here is a structural definition of a Stack:

> a stack is either empty or
> it consistes of a top and the rest which is a stack;

Applications

- The simplest application of a stack is to reverse a word. You push a given word to stack - letter by letter - and then pop letters from the stack.
- Another application is an "undo" mechanism in text editors; this operation is accomplished by keeping all text changes in a stack.



Backtracking. This is a process when you need to access the most recent data element in a series of elements. Think of a labyrinth or maze - how do you find a way from an entrance to an exit?

Once you reach a dead end, you must backtrack. But backtrack to where? to the previous choice point. Therefore, at each choice point you store on a stack all possible choices. Then backtracking simply means popping a next choice from the stack.

Go to the following website and READ THOROUGHLY:

https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~adamchik/15-121/lectures/Stacks%20and%20Queues/Stacks%20and%20Queues.html