

CS 420 / CS 620
(Deterministic) Finite Automata

Wednesday, September 10, 2025
UMass Boston Computer Science

Announcements

HW 0

- Due: ~~9/10 noon EDT~~

HW 1

- Out: 9/8
- Due: 9/15 noon EDT

Lecture videos (from 420-02)

- Posted to Canvas
- Presented as-is, no guarantees
 - Not accepting questions
- For emergency / supplemental use only
- Attendance still taken in lectures

HW Hints and Reminders

- Problems must be: assigned to the correct pages
- Proof format must be: a **Statements** and **Justifications** table
- Machine formal descriptions must have:
 - a name (if required), e.g., $M = \dots$
 - a tuple with 5 components,
 - e.g., $M = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$ (where each variable is subsequently defined)
 - inline is ok (make sure it's readable)
 - components of the correct type
 - E.g., set or sequence or ???

How to ask for HW help

(there's no such thing as a stupid question, but ...)

... there **is** such thing as a **less useful** question (gets less useful answers)

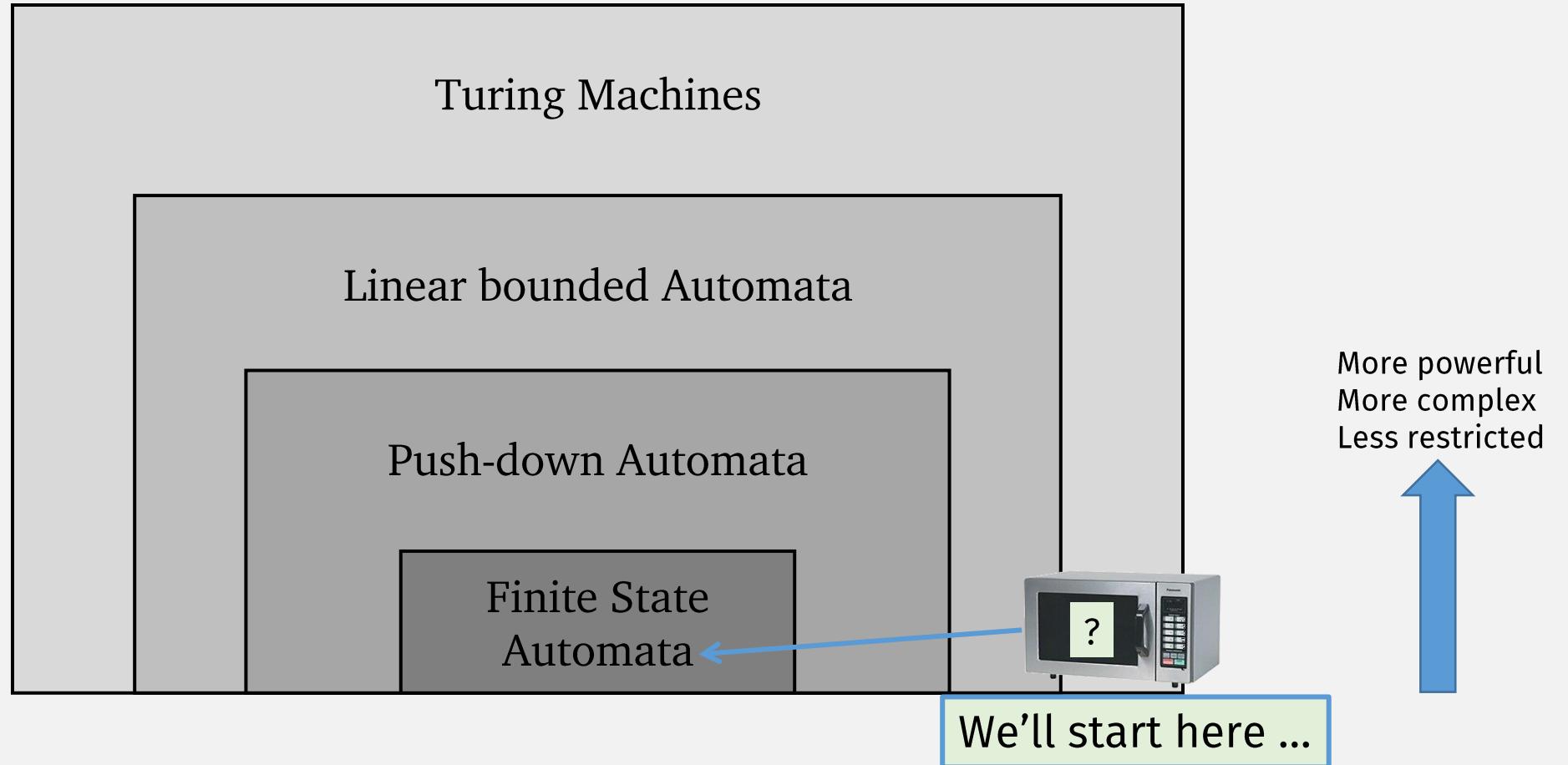
- “Is this correct?”
- “I don’t get it”
- “Give me a hint?”
- “Do I need to do the thing DFA thing?”

Useful question examples
(gets useful answers):

- “I’m don’t understand this notation $A \otimes B \ggg C$... and I couldn’t find it in the book”
- “I couldn’t find this word’s definition ...”

Most HW questions can be answered by looking up the meaning of a word or notation or definition!

Models of Computation Hierarchy



Last Time

A (Mathematical) Theory ...

Mathematical theory

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A **mathematical theory** is a [mathematical model](#) of a branch of mathematics that is based on a set of [axioms](#). It can also simultaneously be a [body of knowledge](#) (e.g., based on known axioms and definitions), and so in this sense can refer to an area of mathematical research within the established framework.^{[1][2]}

Explanatory depth is one of the most significant theoretical virtues in mathematics. For example, set theory has the ability to [systematize and explain](#) number theory and geometry/analysis. Despite the widely logical necessity (and self-evidence) of arithmetic truths such as $1 < 3$, $2+2=4$, $6-1=5$, and so on, a theory that just postulates an infinite blizzard of such truths would be inadequate. Rather an adequate theory is one in which such truths are derived from explanatorily prior axioms, such as the Peano Axioms or set theoretic axioms, which lie at the foundation of ZFC axiomatic set theory.

The singular accomplishment of axiomatic set theory is its ability to give a foundation for the derivation of the entirety of classical mathematics from a handful of axioms. The reason set theory is so prized is because of its explanatory depth. So a mathematical theory which just postulates an infinity of arithmetic truths without explanatory depth would not be a serious competitor to Peano arithmetic or Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory.^{[3][4]}

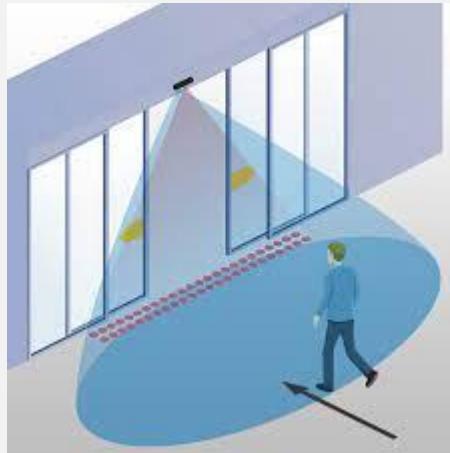
... must explain (predict) some real-world phenomena ...

Maxwell's Equations

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0 \quad \nabla \cdot \mathbf{D} = \rho$$
$$\nabla \times \mathbf{E} = -\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t}$$
$$\nabla \times \mathbf{H} = \frac{\partial \mathbf{D}}{\partial t} + \mathbf{J}$$

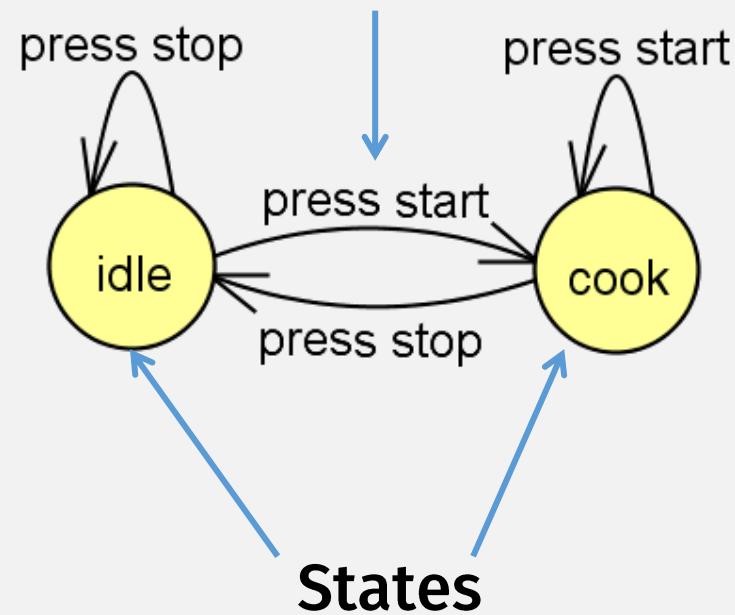


Finite Automata: “Simple” Computation / “Programs”



A Microwave Finite Automata

**Input “symbols” change states
(possibly)**



Finite Automata: Not Just for Appliances

Finite Automata:
a common
programming pattern



State pattern

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The state pattern is a behavioral software design pattern that allows an object to alter its behavior when its internal state changes. This pattern is close to the concept of finite-state machines. The state pattern can be interpreted as a strategy pattern, which is able to switch a strategy through invocations or methods defined in the pattern's interface.

(More powerful?) Computation
“Simulating” other (weaker?) Computation
(a common theme this semester)



Video Games Love Finite Automata

The Unity Documentation page for State Machine Basics is shown, with the URL [Unity User Manual 2020.3 \(LTS\) / Animation / Animator Controllers / Animation State Machines / State Machine Basics](#).

The basic idea is that a character is engaged in some particular kind of action at any given time. The actions available will depend on the type of gameplay but typical actions include things like idling, walking, running, jumping, etc. These actions are referred to as **states**, in the sense that the character is in a “state” where it is walking, idling or whatever. In general, the character will have restrictions on the next state it can go to rather than being able to switch immediately from any state to any other. For example, a running jump can only be taken when the character is already running and not when it is at a standstill, so it should never switch straight from the idle state to the running jump state. The options for the next state that a character can enter from its current state are referred to as **state transitions**. Taken together, the set of states, the set of transitions and the variable to remember the current state form a **state machine**.

The states and transitions of a state machine can be represented using a graph diagram, where the nodes represent the states and the arcs (arrows between nodes) represent the transitions. You can think of the current state as being a marker or highlight that is placed on one of the nodes and can then only jump to another node along one of the arrows.

```
graph TD; Idle[Idle] --> StandingJump[Standing Jump]; Idle --> Walk[Walk]; Idle --> Run[Run]; Walk --> Fall[Fall]; Walk --> Run; Run --> Fall; Run --> StandingJump; Fall --> StandingJump;
```

The diagram illustrates a state machine with five states: Idle, Walk, Run, Fall, and Standing Jump. Transitions are as follows:

- From Idle to Standing Jump
- From Idle to Walk
- From Idle to Run
- From Walk to Fall
- From Walk to Run
- From Run to Fall
- From Run to Standing Jump
- From Fall to Standing Jump

Finite Automata in Video Games

ValveSoftware / halflife

<> Code Issues 1.6k Pull requests 23 Actions Projects Wiki

5d761709a3 · halflife / game_shared / bot / simple_state_machine.h

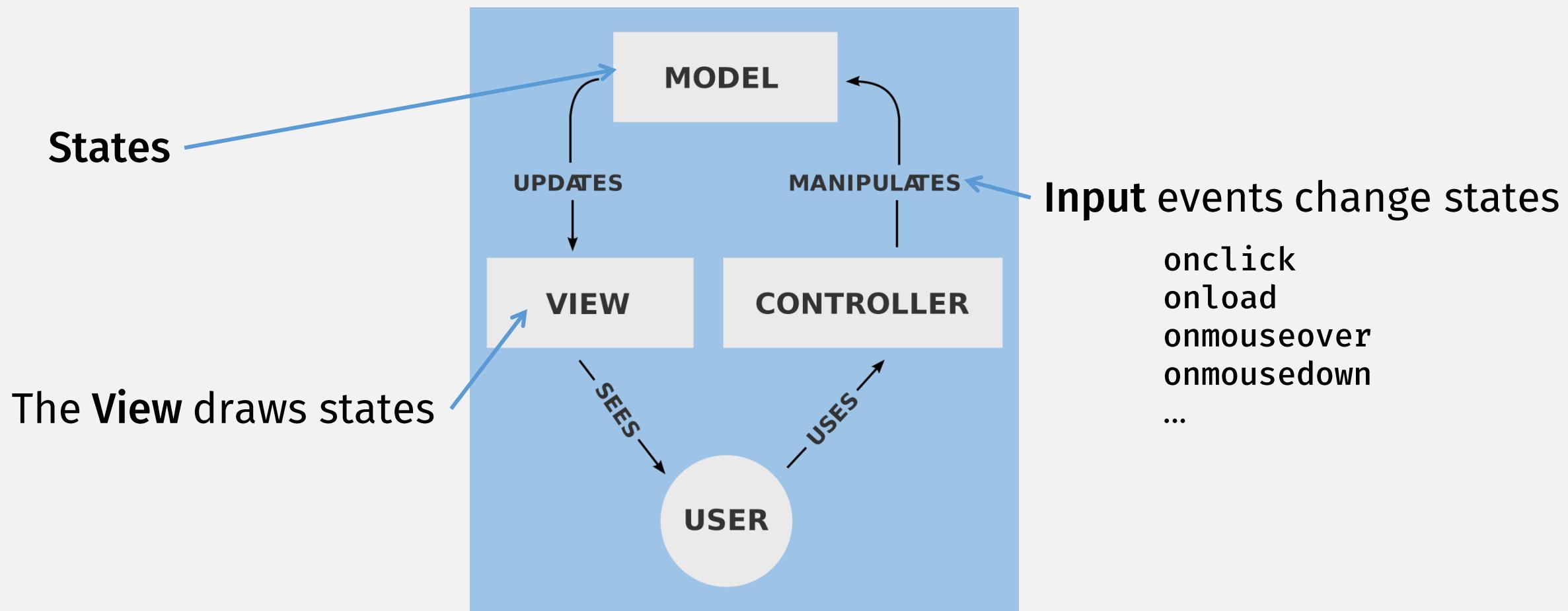
Alfred Reynolds initial seed of Half-Life 1 SDK

0 contributors

85 lines (67 sloc) | 2.15 KB

```
1 // simple_state_machine.h
2 // Simple finite state machine encapsulation
3 // Author: Michael S. Booth (mike@turtlerockstudios.com), November 2003
4
5 #ifndef _SIMPLE_STATE_MACHINE_H_
6 #define _SIMPLE_STATE_MACHINE_H_
7
8 //-----
9 /**
10 * Encapsulation of a finite-state-machine state
11 */
12 template < typename T >
13 class SimpleState
```

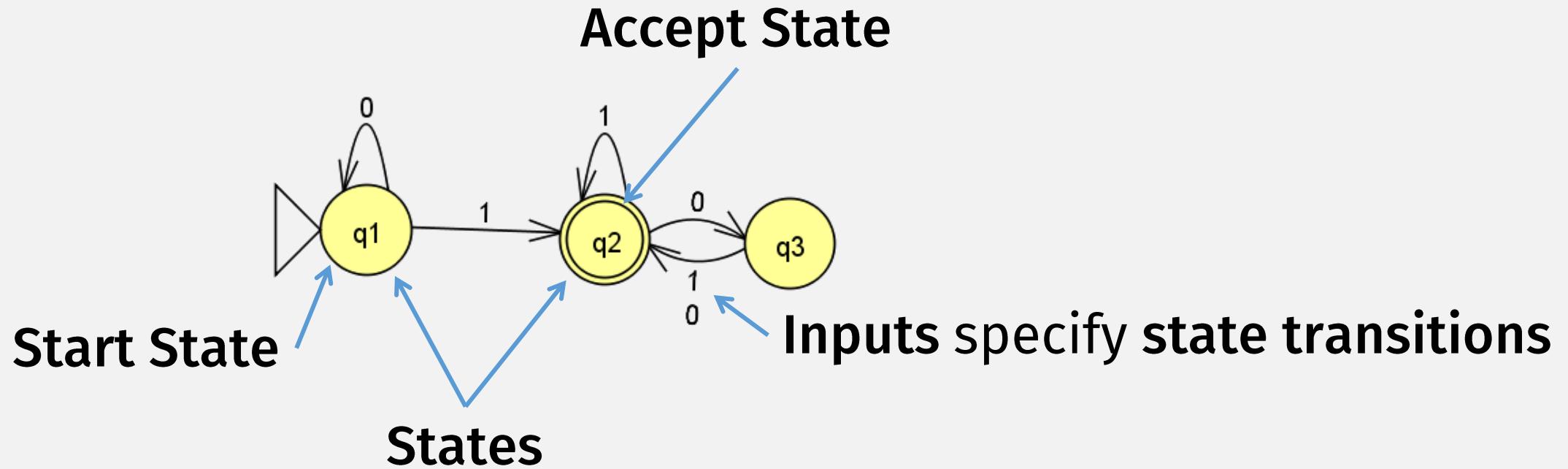
Model-view-controller (MVC) is an FSM



Analogy: Finite Automata is a “Program”

- A restricted “program” with access to finite memory
 - Actually, only 1 “cell” of memory!
 - Possible **contents** of memory = # of “states”
- Finite Automata has different representations:
 - Code (won’t use in this class)
 - State diagrams

Finite Automata state diagram



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 - Possible contents of memory = # of states
- Finite Automata has different representations:
 - Code (won’t use in this class)
 - State diagrams
- **Formal math description**
(essentially same as code but in a very different “programming language”)

Finite Automata: The Formal Definition

DEFINITION

deterministic

A **finite automaton** is a 5-tuple $(Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$, where

(DFA)

1. Q is a finite set called the **states**,
2. Σ is a finite set called the **alphabet**,
3. $\delta: Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$ is the **transition function**,
4. $q_0 \in Q$ is the **start state**, and
5. $F \subseteq Q$ is the **set of accept states**.

This semester

Things in **bold** have precise formal definitions.
(be sure to look up and review the definition whenever you are unsure)

Analogy

This is the “programming language” for (**deterministic**) finite automata “programs”

Finite Automata: The Formal Definition

DEFINITION

Set or sequence?

5 components

A *finite automaton* is a $5\text{-tuple } (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$, where

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Interlude: Sets and Sequences

- Both are: mathematical objects that group other objects
- **Members** of the group are called **elements**
- Can be: empty, finite, or infinite
- Can contain: other sets or sequences

Sets

- Unordered
- Duplicates not allowed
- Notation: {}
- **Empty set** written: \emptyset or {}
- A **language** is a (possibly infinite) set of strings

A set used a lot in this course

Sequences

- Ordered
- Duplicates ok
- Notation: varies: (), comma, or concat
- **Empty sequence:** ()
- A **tuple** is a finite sequence
- A **string** is a finite sequence of characters

sequences used a lot in this course

Set or Sequence ?

A function is ...

... a **set of pairs**
(1st of each pair from **domain**, 2nd from **range**)

... has many representations:
a mapping, a table, ...

DEFINITION

A *finite automaton* is a 5-tuple $(Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$, where

set

1. Q is a finite set called the *states*,

Set of pairs
(domain)

2. Σ is a finite set called the *alphabet*,

3. $\delta: Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$ is the *transition function*,

Don't know!
(states can be
anything)

4. $q_0 \in Q$ is the *start state*, and

Set (range)

5. $F \subseteq Q$ is the *set of accept states*.

sequence

A **pair** is ...

a **sequence** of 2 elements

Finite Automata: The Formal Definition

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5 components

Analogy: Finite Automata is a “Program”

- A restricted “program” with access to finite memory
 - Only 1 “cell” of memory!
 - Possible contents of memory = # of states
- Finite Automata has different equivalent representations:
 - Code (won’t use in this class)
 - State diagrams
 - Formal math description
(think of it as code in a very different “programming language”)

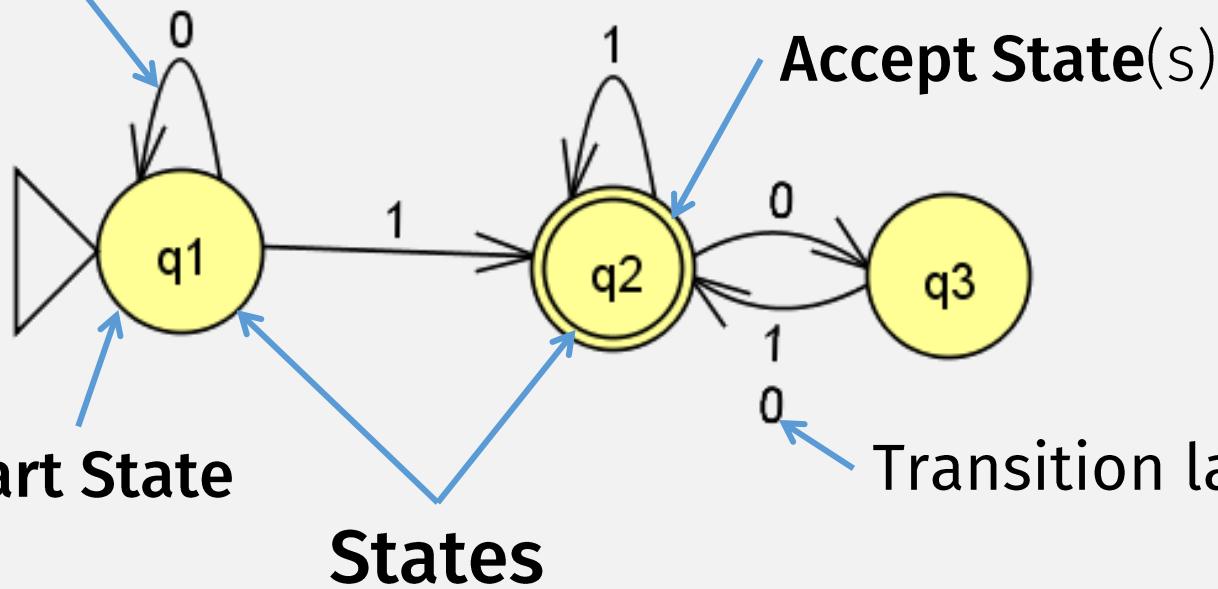
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Finite Automata: State Diagram

Arrows specify **transition function**



Start State

States

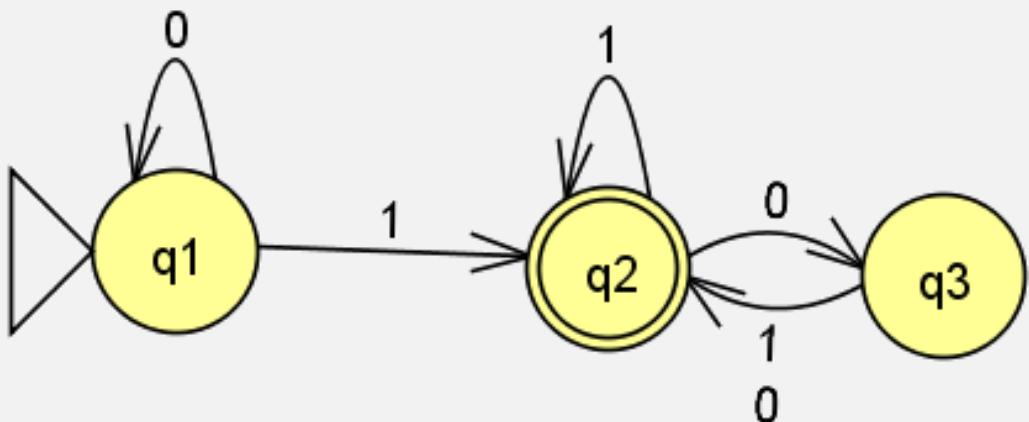
Accept State(s)

Transition labels must be from **alphabet**

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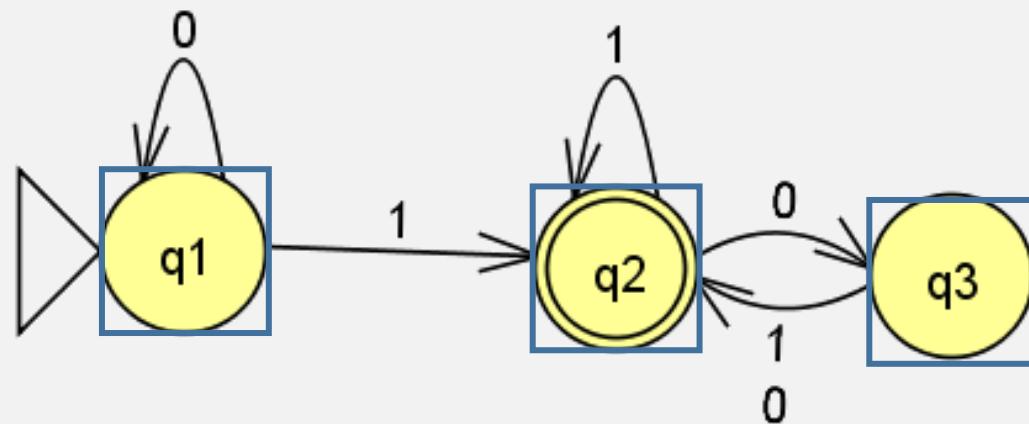


An Example (as **state diagram**)

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An Example (as **state diagram**)

An Example (as formal description)

$M_1 = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_1, F)$, where

1. $Q = \{q_1, q_2, q_3\}$,
2. $\Sigma = \{0, 1\}$,
3. δ is described as

braces =
set notation
(no duplicates)

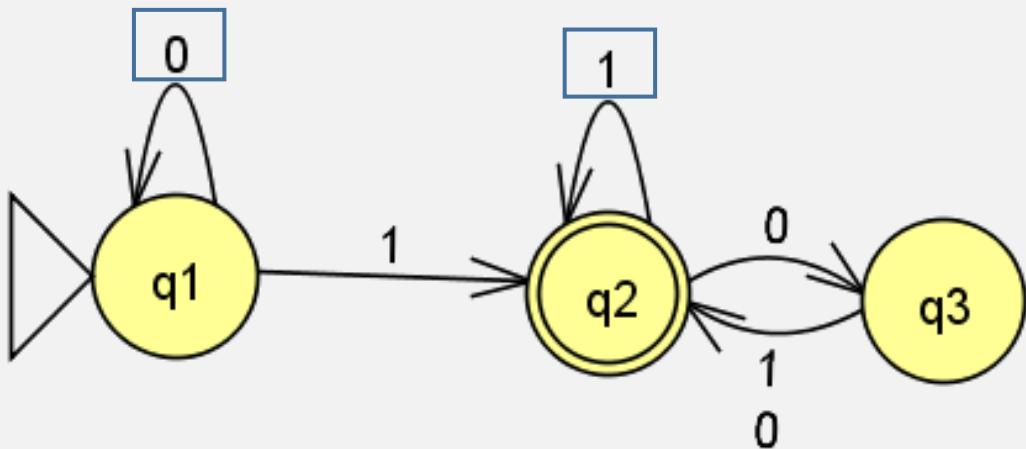
	0	1
q_1	q_1	q_2
q_2	q_3	q_2
q_3	q_2	q_2

4. q_1 is the start state, and
5. $F = \{q_2\}$.

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$M_1 = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_1, F)$, where

1. $Q = \{q_1, q_2, q_3\}$,
2. $\Sigma = \{0, 1\}$,
 Possible chars of input
3. δ is described

Alphabet defines all possible input strings for the machine

	0	
q_1	q_1	q_2
q_2	q_3	q_2
q_3	q_2	q_2

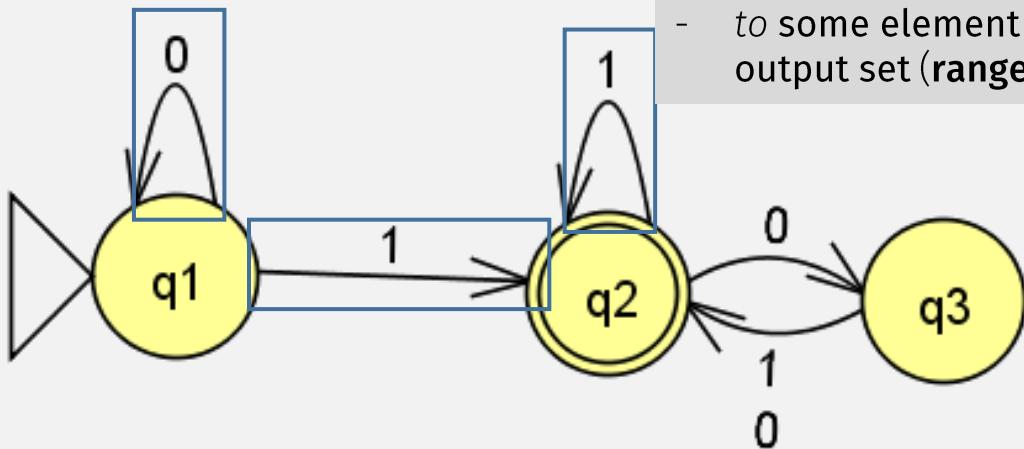
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There are many different ways to write a **function**, i.e., a **mapping** ...
- from every element in the input set(s) (**domain**)
- to some element in the output set (**range**)

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2. $\Sigma = \{0, 1\}$,

3. δ is described as

	0	1
“If in this state”	q_1	q_1
q_1	q_3	q_2
q_2	q_2	“Then go to this state”

4. q_1 is the start state, and
5. $F = \{q_2\}$.

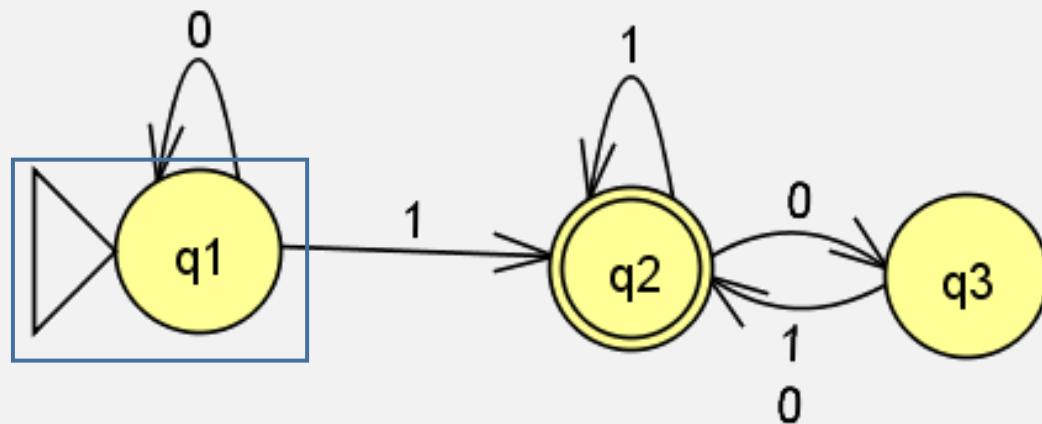
“And this is next input symbol”

“Then go to this state”

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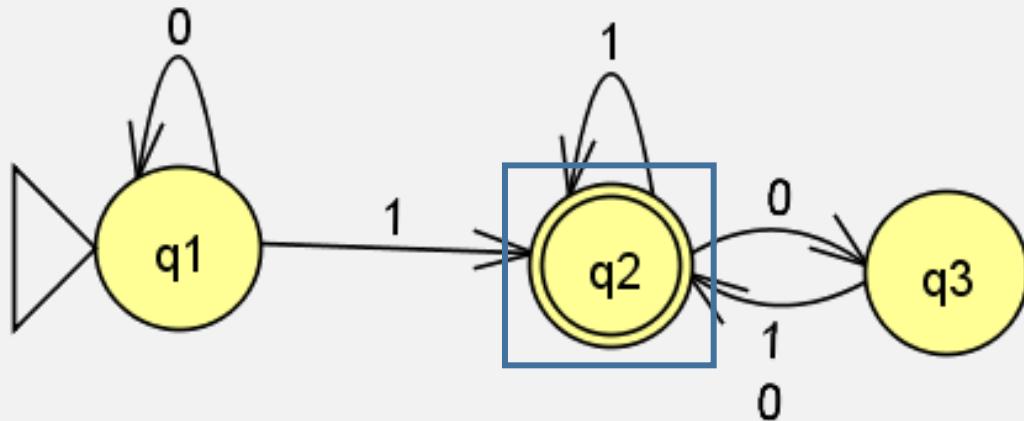
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WARNING: This is a **set**!



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q_3	q_2	q_2

4. q_1 is the start state, and
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WARNING: This is a **set**!

Writing a non-set here makes the whole thing **an invalid DFA**

DEFINITION

A “Programming Language”

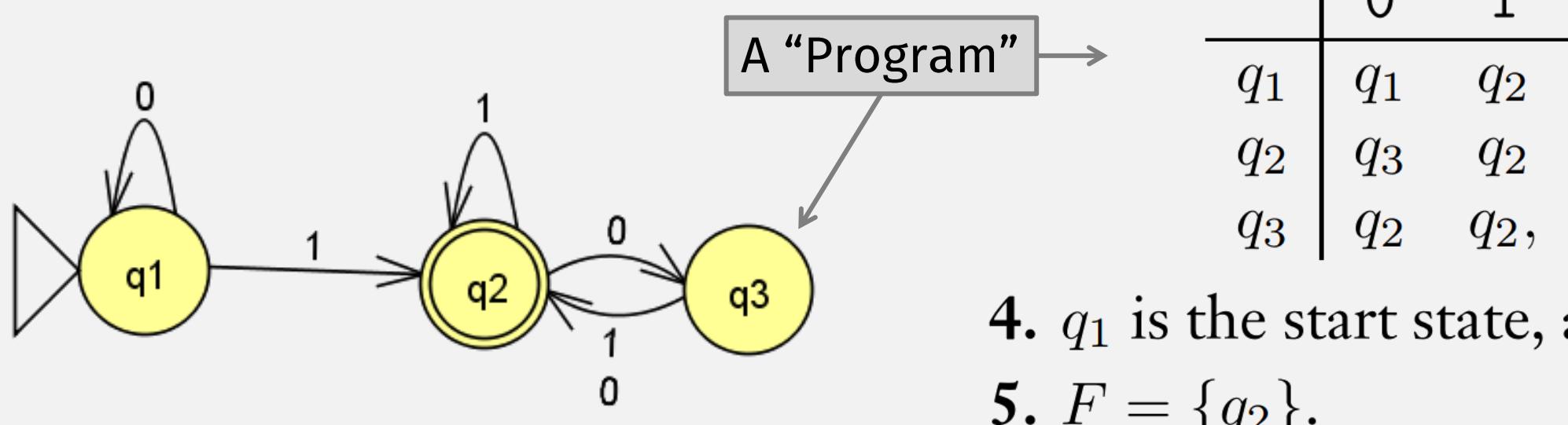
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An Example (as formal description)

$M_1 = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_1, F)$, where

1. $Q = \{q_1, q_2, q_3\}$,
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“Programming” Analogy

This “analogy” is meant to help your intuition

But it's important not to confuse with **formal definitions**.

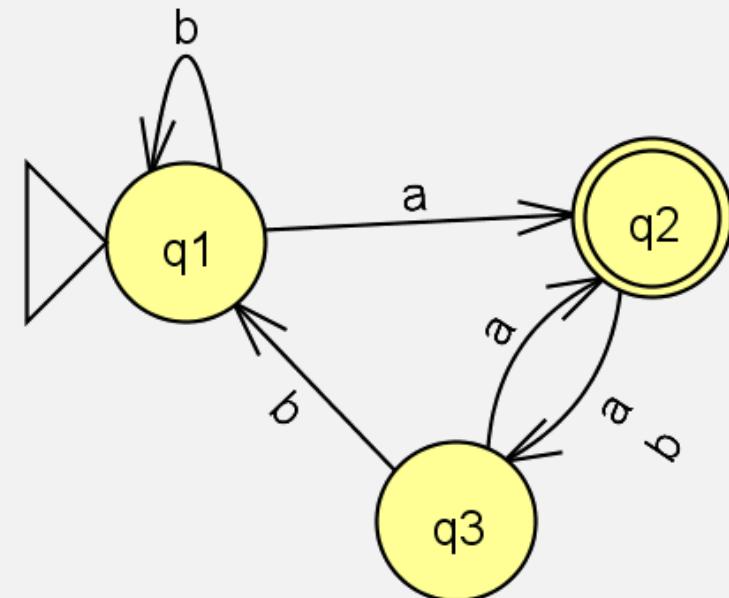
In-class Exercise (5min)

Come up with a formal description of the following machine:

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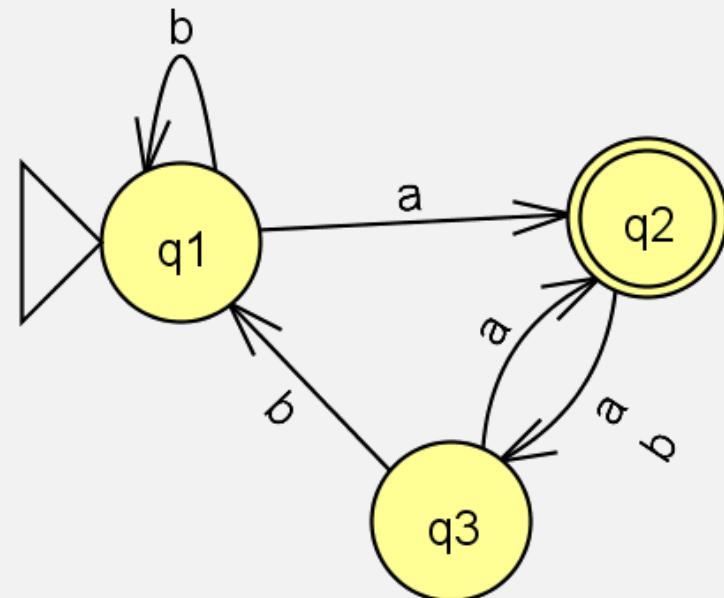
In-class Exercise: solution

- $Q = \{q_1, q_2, q_3\}$
- $\Sigma = \{ \mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b} \}$
- δ
 - $\delta(q_1, \mathbf{a}) = q_2$
 - $\delta(q_1, \mathbf{b}) = q_1$
 - $\delta(q_2, \mathbf{a}) = q_3$
 - $\delta(q_2, \mathbf{b}) = q_3$
 - $\delta(q_3, \mathbf{a}) = q_2$
 - $\delta(q_3, \mathbf{b}) = q_1$
- $q_0 = q_1$
- $F = \cancel{q_2} \quad \{q_2\}$
????

$$M = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$$

There are many different ways to write a **function**, i.e., a **mapping** ...

- from every element in the input set(s) (**domain**)
- to some element in the output set (**range**)



A Computation Model is ... (from lecture 1)

- Some **definitions** ...

e.g., A **Natural Number** is either

- Zero
- a Natural Number + 1

- And **rules** that describe how to **compute** with the **definitions** ...

To add two **Natural Numbers**:

- Add the ones place of each num
- Carry anything over 10
- Repeat for each of remaining digits ...

A Computation Model is ... (from lecture 1)

- Some definitions ...

docs.python.org/3/reference/grammar.html

10. Full Grammar specification

This is the full Python grammar, derived directly from the grammar used to generate the CPython parser ([Grammar/python.gram](#)). The version here omits details related to code generation and error recovery.

```
# ===== START OF THE GRAMMAR =====

# General grammatical elements and rules:
#
# * Strings with double quotes ("") denote SOFT KEYWORDS
# * Strings with single quotes ('') denote KEYWORDS
# * Upper case names (NAME) denote tokens in the Grammar/Tokens file
# * Rule names starting with "invalid_" are used for specialized syntax errors
#   - These rules are NOT used in the first pass of the parser.
#   - Only if the first pass fails to parse, a second pass including the invalid
#     rules will be executed.
#   - If the parser fails in the second phase with a generic syntax error, the
#     location of the generic failure of the first pass will be used (this avoids
#     reporting incorrect locations due to the invalid rules).
#   - The order of the alternatives involving invalid rules matter
#     (like any rule in PFG).
```



- And rules that describe how to compute with the definitions ...

docs.python.org/3/reference/executionmodel.html

4. Execution model

4.1. Structure of a program

A Python program is constructed from code blocks. A *block* is a piece of Python program text that is executed as a unit. The following are blocks: a module, a function body, and a class definition. Each command typed interactively is a block. A script file (a file given as standard input to the interpreter or specified as a command line argument to the interpreter) is a code block. A script command (a command specified on the interpreter command line using the `-c` option) is a code block. A module run as a top level script (as module `__main__`) from the command line using a `-m` argument is also a code block. The string argument passed to the built-in functions `eval()` and `exec()` is a code block.

A code block is executed in an *execution frame*. A frame contains some administrative information (used for debugging) and determines where and how execution continues after the code block's execution has completed.

4.2 Naming and binding

A Computation Model is ... (from lecture 1)

- Some **definitions** ...

DEFINITION

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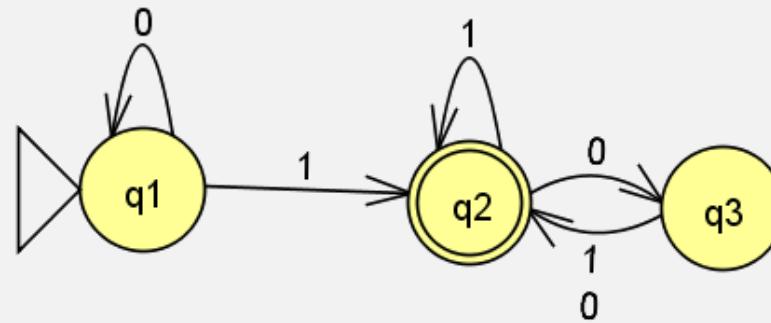
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3. $\delta: Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$ is the **transition function**,
4. $q_0 \in Q$ is the **start state**, and
5. $F \subseteq Q$ is the **set of accept states**.

- And **rules** that describe how to **compute** with the **definitions** ...

???

Computation with DFAs (JFLAP demo)

- DFA:



- Input: “1101”

HINT: always work out concrete examples to understand how a machine works

DFA Computation Rules

Informally

Given

- A DFA (~ a “Program”)
- and **Input** = string of chars, e.g. “1101”

A DFA computation (~ “Program run”):

- Starts in *start state*
- Repeats:
 - Read 1 char from **Input**, and
 - Change state according to *transition rules*

Result of computation:

- Accept if last state is *Accept state*
- Reject otherwise

DFA Computation Rules

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Informally

Given

- A DFA (~ a “Program”) $\xrightarrow{\hspace{2cm}}$ • $M =$
- and Input = string of chars, e.g. “1101” $\xrightarrow{\hspace{2cm}}$ • $w =$

A DFA computation (~ “Program run”):

- Starts in **start state**
- Repeats:
 - Read 1 char from Input, and
 - Change state according to *transition rules*

Formally (i.e., mathematically)

Result of computation:

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DFA Computation Rules

Informally

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if $i=1$, $r_1 = \delta(r_0, w_1)$

if $i=2$, $r_2 = \delta(r_1, w_2)$

if $i=3$, $r_3 = \delta(r_2, w_3)$

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This is still pretty
verbose ...

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- **M accepts w** if $r_n \in F$
- **M rejects w** if $r_n \notin F$

$\delta: Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$ is the **transition function**
(one-step)

A Multi-Step Transition Function

Define a **multi-step transition function**: $\hat{\delta}: Q \times \Sigma^* \rightarrow Q$

- Domain:

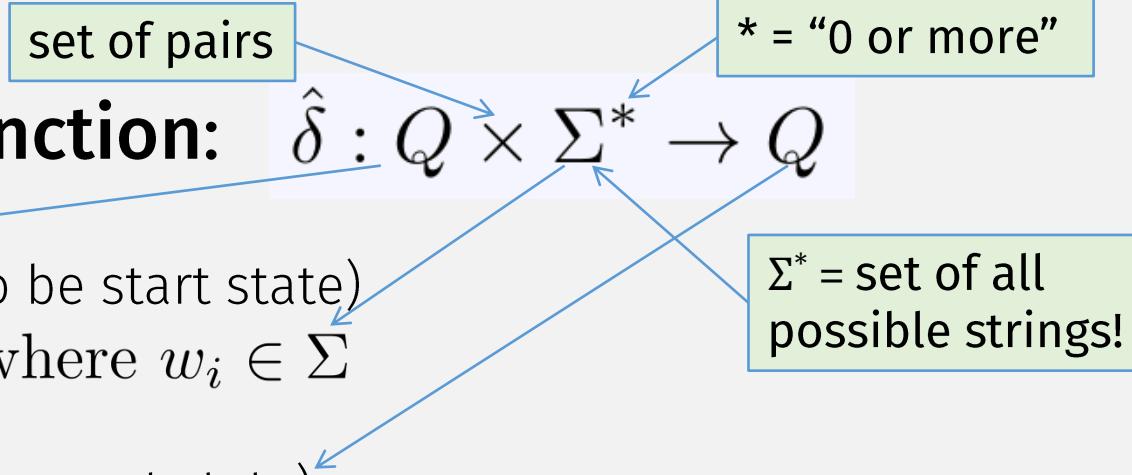
- Input state $q \in Q$ (doesn't have to be start state)
- Input string $w = w_1 w_2 \cdots w_n$ where $w_i \in \Sigma$

- Range:

- Output state (doesn't have to be an accept state)

(Defined recursively)

- Base case: ...



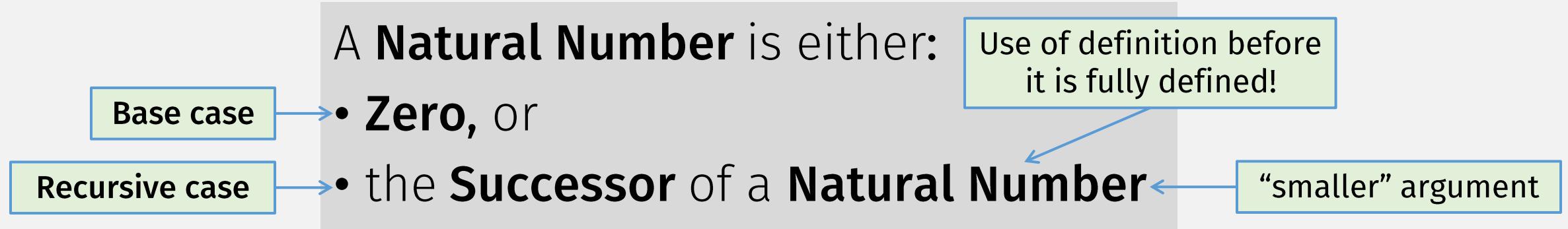
Interlude: Recursive Definitions

```
function factorial( n )
{
    if ( n == 0 )
        return 1;
    else
        return n * factorial( n - 1 );
}
```

Base case → if (n == 0)
Recursive case → else
Function is called before it is fully defined!
Recursive call with “smaller” argument

- Why is this allowed?
 - It’s a “feature” (i.e., an axiom!) of the programming language
- Why does this “work”? (Why doesn’t it loop forever?)
 - Because the recursive call always has a “smaller” argument ...
 - ... and so eventually reaches the base case and stops

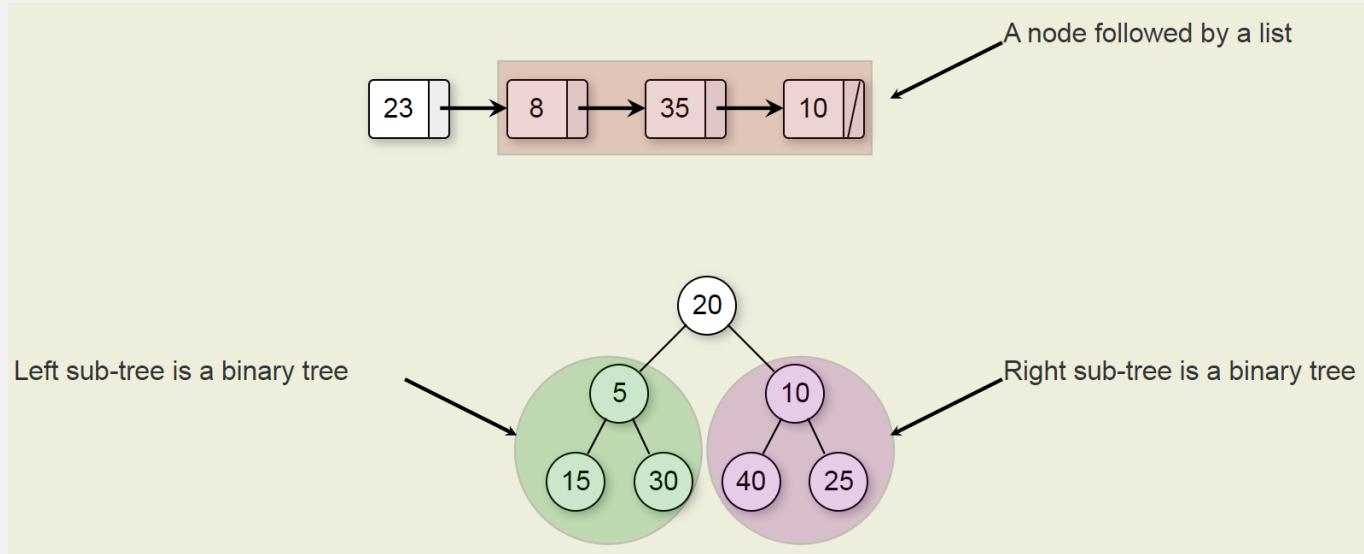
Recursive Definitions



Examples

- Zero
- Successor of Zero (= “one”)
- Successor of Successor of Zero (= “two”)
- Successor of Successor of Successor of Zero (= “three”) ...

Recursive Data Definitions

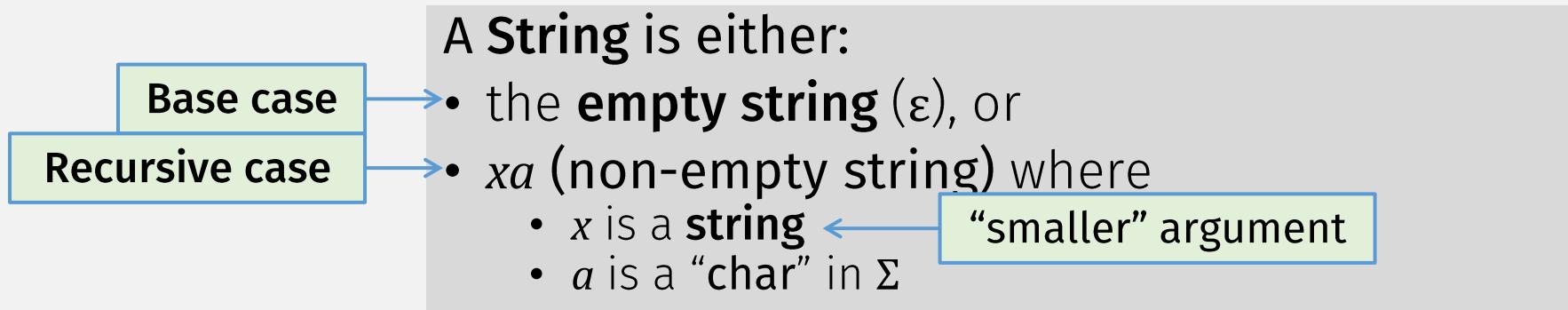


Recursive definitions have:
- base case and
- recursive case
(with a “smaller” object)

```
/* Linked list Node*/
class Node {
    int data;
    Node next;
}
```

This is a recursive definition:
Node is used before it is fully defined (but must be “smaller”)

Strings Are Defined Recursively



Remember: all strings are formed with “chars” from some alphabet set Σ

Σ^* = set of all possible strings!

Recursive Data \Rightarrow Recursive Functions

A **Natural Number** is either:

- Zero, or
- the **Successor** of a **Natural Number**

Base case

Recursive case

```
function factorial( n )  
{  
    if ( n == 0 )  
        return 1;  
    else  
        return n * factorial( n - 1 );  
}
```

Recursive case must have “smaller” argument

Recursive functions are recursive because ...
its input data is recursively defined!

A Multi-Step Transition Function

Define a **multi-step transition function**: $\hat{\delta} : Q \times \Sigma^* \rightarrow Q$

- Domain:

- Input state $q \in Q$ (doesn't have to be start state)
- Input **string** $w = w_1 w_2 \cdots w_n$ where $w_i \in \Sigma$

- Range:

- Output state (doesn't have to be an accept state)

Recursive Input Data
needs
Recursive Function

(Defined recursively)

- Base case $\hat{\delta}(q, \varepsilon) =$

Base case

A String is either:

- the **empty string** (ε), or
- xa (non-empty string)
where
 - x is a **string**
 - a is a “char” in Σ

A Multi-Step Transition Function

Define a **multi-step transition function**: $\hat{\delta} : Q \times \Sigma^* \rightarrow Q$

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Recursive Input Data
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Recursive Function

(Defined recursively)

- Base case $\hat{\delta}(q, \varepsilon) = q$

- Recursive Case

$$\hat{\delta}(q, w' w_n) = \hat{\delta}(\hat{\delta}(q, w'), w_n)$$

where $w' = w_1 \cdots w_{n-1}$

Recursive call

string char

Recursive case

"smaller" argument

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(or “extended transition function” --- HMU 2.2.4)

$\delta: Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$ is the **transition function**

A Multi-Step Transition Function

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- Recursive Case $\hat{\delta}(q, w'w_n) = \hat{\delta}(\hat{\delta}(q, w'), w_n)$

where $w' = w_1 \cdots w_{n-1}$

Previously

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- **M accepts w** if $\hat{\delta}(q_0, w) \in F$
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Alphabets, Strings, Languages

An alphabet defines “all possible strings”

- An **alphabet** is a non-empty finite set of symbols

$$\Sigma_1 = \{0,1\}$$

(strings with non-alphabet symbols are impossible)

$$\Sigma_2 = \{a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z\}$$

- A **string** is a finite sequence of symbols from an alphabet

01001

abracadabra

ϵ

Empty string (length 0)

(ϵ symbol is not in the alphabet!)

- A **language** is a set of strings

$$A = \{\text{good, bad}\}$$

\emptyset { }

Languages can be infinite

$A = \{w \mid w \text{ contains at least one 1 and}$
↑
 $\text{an even number of 0s follow the last 1}\}$

“the set of all ...”

“such that ...”

The Empty set is a language

Machine and Language Terminology

- The **language** of a machine = set of strings that it **accepts**

- E.g., A **DFA** M **accepts** w ← **string**
 M **recognizes language** A ← **Set of strings**
if $A = \{w \mid M \text{ accepts } w\}$
“the set of all ...” “such that ...”

Machine and Language Terminology

- The **language** of a machine = set of strings that it **accepts**

- E.g., A **DFA** M **accepts** w

M **recognizes language** $L(M)$

$$L(M) = \{w \mid M \text{ accepts } w\}$$

Using L as function mapping
Machine \rightarrow **Language** is
common notation

Machine and Language Terminology

- The **language** of a machine = set of strings that it **accepts**
- E.g., A **DFA** M **accepts** w
 M **recognizes language** $L(M)$
- Language of $M = L(M) = \{w \mid M \text{ accepts } w\}$

Languages Are Computation Models

- The **language** of a machine = set of strings that it **accepts**
 - E.g., a DFA recognizes a language
- A **computation model** = set of machines it defines
 - E.g., all possible DFAs are a computation model

DEFINITION

A *finite automaton* is a 5-tuple $(Q, \Sigma, \delta, q_0, F)$, where

1. Q is a finite set called the *states*,
2. Σ is a finite set called the *alphabet*,
3. $\delta: Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$ is the *transition function*,
4. $q_0 \in Q$ is the *start state*, and
5. $F \subseteq Q$ is the *set of accept states*.

= set of set of strings

Thus: a **computation model** equivalently = a set of languages

This class is really about studying sets of languages!

Regular Languages

- first set of languages we will study: **regular languages**

This class is really about studying sets of languages!

Regular Languages: Definition

If a **deterministic finite automata (DFA)** recognizes a language, then that language is called a **regular language**.

A Language, Regular or Not?

- If given: a DFA M
 - We know: $L(M)$, the language recognized by M , is a **regular language**

Proof : If a DFA recognizes a language,
then that language is called a **regular language**.

(modus ponens)

- If given: a Language A
 - Is A a **regular language**?
 - Not necessarily!

Proof : ??????