

Class 48: Merge Sort

Held: Wednesday, 25 November 2009

Summary: We continue our exploration of sorting by considering the applicability of divide-and-conquer to the problem of sorting. We look at one particular divide-and-conquer algorithm, *merge sort*. We explore how the running time for that algorithm varies based on the number of values we are sorting.

Related Pages:

- EBoard.
- Lab: Merge Sort.
- Reading: Merge Sort.

Notes:

- No reading for Monday. (I may distribute links to the project images so that we can better discuss project code on Monday.)
- I hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

Overview:

- More efficient sorting techniques.
- Divide and conquer, revisited.
- Merge sort.
- Analyzing merge sort.

Key Ideas of Merge Sort

- Divide and conquer is often a useful design strategy.
- For sorting, natural division is "first half" / "second half".
- What do we do after sorting the two halves? Merge 'em.

An Alternate Implementation

- We can do something very much like merge sort while avoiding the splitting step.
- We start with a list of sorted lists, and repeatedly merge neighboring pairs.
- This technique is slightly easier to implement.
- This technique is much easier to analyze.

The Costs of Merge Sort

- What's the running time? We do approximately $N \cdot \log_2 N$ comparisons.
- The analysis:
 - N steps to merge 2 sorted lists of length $N/2$
 - N steps to merge 4 sorted lists of length $N/4$ into those two sorted lists.
 - N steps to merge 8 sorted lists of length $N/8$ into those four sorted lists.
 - And so on and so forth.
- Can we do better? Not if our sorting is based on comparing values to each other.

Lab

- Do the lab.
- Pause to reflect.

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