

## Class 49: Merge Sort

**Held:** Monday, May 3, 2010

**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:

- For Tuesday and Wednesday, please review your classmates' work (URL distributed electronically).
- I'll reserve time at the start of class for questions on the examination.
- EC for Thursday's Convocation.
- EC for Sunday's Belly Dance performance (1:30 in Flanagan).

### 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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