

Class 42: Association Lists and Searching

Held: Wednesday, 16 April 2008

Summary: We consider *association lists*, a simple, but useful, technique for organizing tables of information.

Related Pages:

- EBoard.
- Lab: Association Lists.
- Reading: Association Lists.
- Due: Assignment 9: Palettes and Vectors.

Notes:

- I feel like a broken record, but I consider it important enough that I will reserve time at the start of class for any comments you have on campus climate.
- We have another visitor today.
- EC for Gene Gaub's concert Thursday at 11 a.m. in Herrick.
- EC for Thursday afternoon's CS Thursday extra on TCDB.
- EC for Lunch on Saturday from Neuroscience SEPC on "Why and how to go to grad school in Neuroscience"
- EC for Symphonic Band on the 20th. Check the memo for time/place.
- EC for Discussion of Mental Health on Campus on the 22nd.
- Assigned: The Project (due Friday the 25th.)
- Reading for Friday: Project Ideas. (Not ready until Friday.)

Overview:

- Storing information in tables.
- Representing table entries as lists.
- Representing tables as lists.
- Association lists: Scheme's standard table representation.
- Implementing key association list procedures.

Simple Database Problems

- Databases are among the most common applications of computers.
 - After all, there's a reason that Larry Ellison is nearly as rich as Bill Gates.
- A database is a mechanism for storing data so that you can easily access the data you need.
- One simple database activity is looking up values by *keys*.
- Databases that provide only that activity are called *dictionaries*.

Association Lists

- In Scheme, dictionaries are typically implemented with a data structure known as the *association list*.
- An association list is a list of elements each of which has a key as its car.
- You can use the (`assoc key list`) procedure to look up values by key.

Searching in Association Lists

- Suppose Scheme didn't include `assoc`. How would you write it? Probably *recursively*.
- If the list is empty, it does not contain the value.
- If the key of the first element in the list is the key we're looking for, return the corresponding value.
- Otherwise, look in the rest of the list.
- This technique is called *sequential search*.

Variants of Association Lists

- Given that we can write our own `assoc` procedure, we can easily implement a number of interesting variants of association lists.
- For example, if the same key appears multiple times in the association list, we might return *all* matching values (rather than the *first* matching value).
- Similarly, instead of searching by key, we might search by predicate.

alists-lab

- Do the lab.

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