

## Class 43: Binary Search

**Held:** Wednesday, April 18, 2007

**Summary:** Today we explore the problem of searching and explore a particular searching algorithm, binary search.

### Related Pages:

- EBoard.
- Lab: Binary Search.
- Reading: Searching Methods.

### Overview:

- About common algorithms.
- Searching.
- Binary search.
- Lab.

## Common Problems and Algorithms

- As we discussed early in the semester, a key aspect of computer science is the design of *algorithms*, formalized processes that provide solutions to problems.
- There are a number of common problems for which computer scientists have developed common solutions.
- We'll visit two problems over the next few days: searching and sorting.
- As we develop algorithms, we'll consider intuitive ways that one might come up with the algorithms.

## Searching

- Goal: Find a value in a collection.
- Typically, the collection is *linear*: A vector or list.
- Sometimes, the collection is also *unordered*. That is, there is no known arrangement to the list. For example, the books on the MathLan book shelves are not in an arrangement that would make it easy to search for a book with a particular title or by a particular author.
- For unordered collections, the typical search is *sequential search*, look at each element in turn.
- Sometimes, the collection is *sorted*. That is, the collection is organized by the primary key in which we search.
  - For example, a phone book is sorted by name.
- However, we can also use something known as *binary search*:
  - Look in the middle of the collection.
  - If the middle is too small, anything smaller is also too small, so discard and try again.

- If the middle is too large, anything larger is also too large, so discard and try again.
- If the middle is just right, you're done.

## Lab

- Do The lab.
  - Be prepared to reflect.
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