Learning Objectives

At the end of the class you should be able to:

- define a directed graph
- represent a problem as a state-space graph
- explain how a generic searching algorithm works

Searching

- Often we are not given an algorithm to solve a problem, but only a specification of what is a solution — we have to search for a solution.
- A typical problem is when the agent is in one state, it has a set of deterministic actions it can carry out, and wants to get to a goal state.
- Many AI problems can be abstracted into the problem of finding a path in a directed graph.
- Often there is more than one way to represent a problem as a graph.

State-space Search

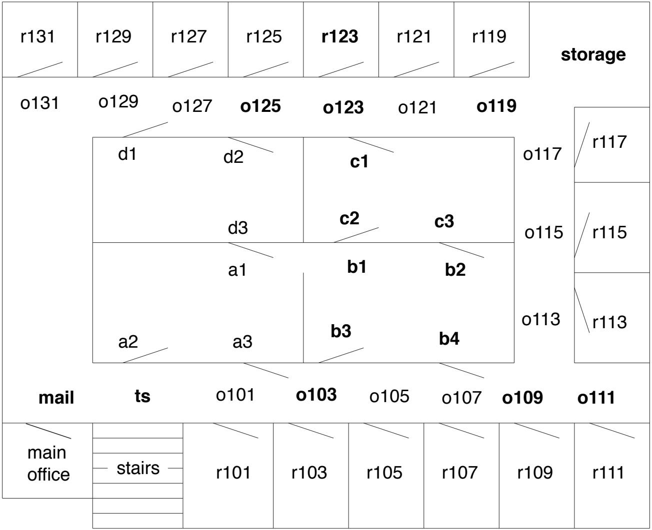
- flat or modular or hierarchical
- explicit states or features or individuals and relations
- static or finite stage or indefinite stage or infinite stage
- fully observable or partially observable
- deterministic or stochastic dynamics
- goals or complex preferences
- single agent or multiple agents
- knowledge is given or knowledge is learned
- perfect rationality or bounded rationality

Directed Graphs

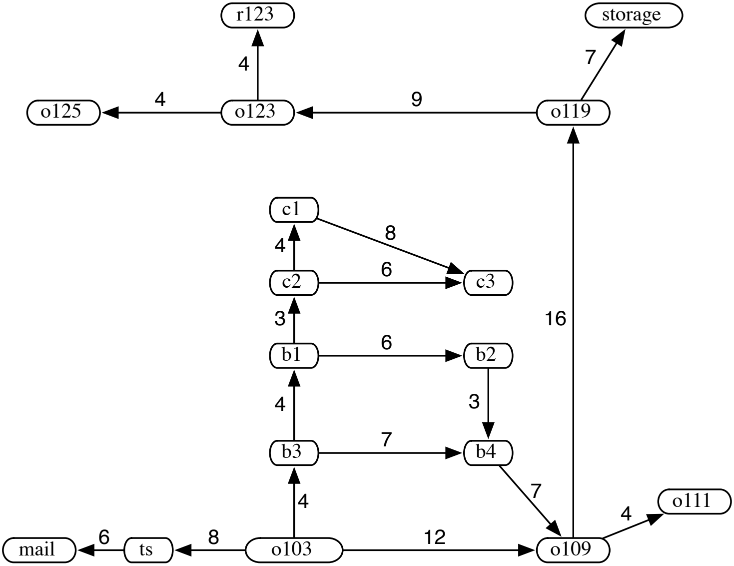
- A graph consists of a set N of nodes and a set A of ordered pairs of nodes, called arcs.
- Node n_2 is a neighbor of n_1 if there is an arc from n_1 to n_2. That is, if $\langle n_1, n_2 \rangle \in A$.
- A path is a sequence of nodes $\langle n_0, n_1, \ldots, n_k \rangle$ such that $\langle n_{i-1}, n_i \rangle \in A$.
- The length of path $\langle n_0, n_1, \ldots, n_k \rangle$ is k.
- Given a set of start nodes and goal nodes, a solution is a path from a start node to a goal node.

Example Problem for Delivery Robot

The robot wants to get from outside room 103 to the inside of room 123.

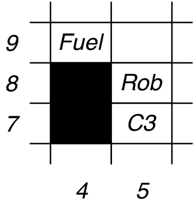


State-Space Graph for the Delivery Robot



Partial Search Space for a Video Game

Grid game: Rob needs to collect coins C_1, C_2, C_3, C_4, without running out of fuel, and end up at location $(1,1)$:



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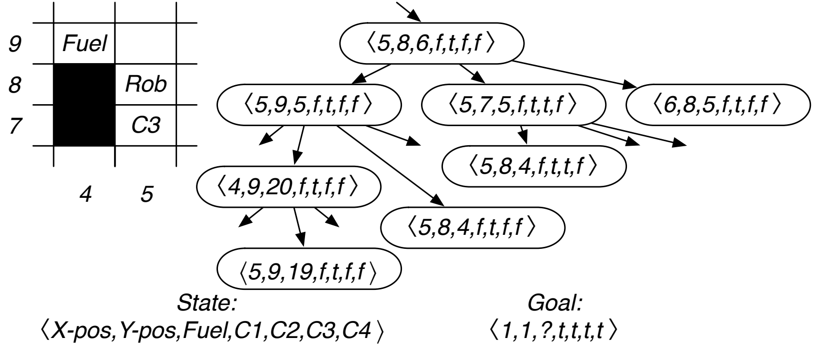
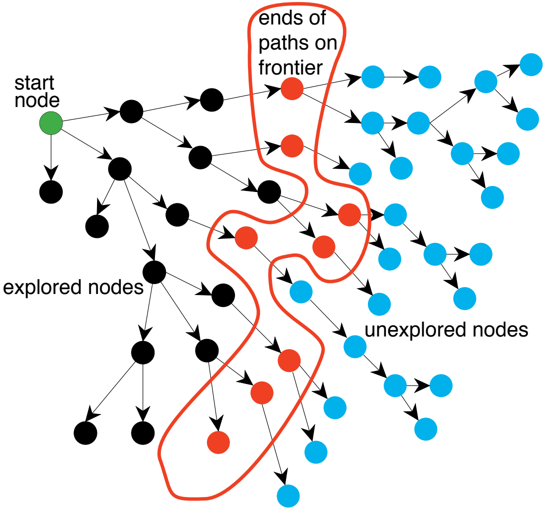


Graph Searching

- Generic search algorithm: given a graph, start nodes, and goal nodes, incrementally explore paths from the start nodes.
- Maintain a frontier of paths from the start node that have been explored.
- As search proceeds, the frontier expands into the unexplored nodes until a goal node is encountered.
- The way in which the frontier is expanded defines the search strategy.

Problem Solving by Graph Searching



Graph Search Algorithm

Input: a graph,
a set of start nodes,
Boolean procedure $goal(n)$ that tests if n is a goal node.
$frontier := \{\langle s \rangle : s \text{ is a start node}\}$;
while *frontier* is not empty:
select and **remove** path $\langle n_0, \ldots, n_k \rangle$ from *frontier*;
if $goal(n_k)$
return $\langle n_0, \ldots, n_k \rangle$;
for every neighbor n of n_k
add $\langle n_0, \ldots, n_k, n \rangle$ to *frontier*;
end while

- Which value is selected from the frontier at each stage defines the search strategy.
- The neighbors define the graph.
- *goal* defines what is a solution.
- If more than one answer is required, the search can continue from the return.