CS41 Lab 11: Polynomial-Time Verifiers and Polynomial-Time Reductions

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This week, we've started to understand what makes some problems seemingly hard to compute. In this lab, we'll consider an easier problem of *verifying* that an algorithm's answer is correct. Recall that a *decision problem* is a problem that requires a YES or NO answer. Alternatively, we can describe decision problem as a set $L \subseteq \{0,1\}^*$; think of L as the set of all YES inputs i.e., the set of inputs x such that one should output YES on input x. Let $|x|$ denote the length of x, in bits.

Polynomial-time Verifiers. Call V an efficient *verifier* for a decision problem L if

1. V is a polynomial-time algorithm that takes two inputs x and w.
2. There is a polynomial function p such that for all strings x, $x \in L$ if and only if there exists w such that $|w| \leq p(|x|)$ and $V(x, w) =$ YES.

w is usually called the *witness* or *certificate*. Think of w as some *proof* that $x \in L$. For V to be a polynomial-time verifier, w must have size some polynomial of the input x. For example, if x represents a graph with n vertices and m edges, the length of w could be n^2 or m^3 or $(n+m)^{100}$ but not 2^n.

Consider this lab a **success** if you complete problem 2 and make progress on problems 3,4.

1. **Transitivity of polynomial-time reductions.** Show the following:

$$\text{If } A \leq_{\mathrm{P}} B \text{ and } B \leq_{\mathrm{P}} C \text{ then } A \leq_{\mathrm{P}} C.$$

2. **Verifier Debugging.** Consider the THREE-COLORING problem: Given $G = (V, E)$ return YES iff the vertices in G can be colored using at most three colors such that each edge $(u, v) \in E$ is *bichromatic*.

   Consider the following verifier for THREE-COLORING. The witness we request is a valid three coloring of the undirected graph $G = (V, E)$, which is specified as a list of two-digit binary strings $w = w_1 w_2 \ldots w_k$ where we interpret

$$w_i = \begin{cases} 00, & \text{vertex } i \text{ is colored BLUE} \\ 01, & \text{vertex } i \text{ is colored GREEN} \\ 10, & \text{vertex } i \text{ is colored RED} \end{cases}$$

threeColoringVerifier$(G = (V, E), w)$

for each w_i in w
    if $w_i = 11$
        return NO
    for j from $i+1$ to $|w|$
        if $w_i = w_j$ and $(i, j) \in E$
            return NO
return YES

This verifier is not quite right.

Give an example witness w and graph G which is *not* three-colorable, such that

$$\textsc{threeColoringVerifier}(G, w) = \textsc{yes}$$

3. Rewrite threeColoringVerifier so that it is a valid verifier for Three-Coloring.

4. Give polynomial-time verifiers for the following problems, none of which are known to have polynomial-time algorithms.

   (a) Independent-Set.

   (b) Vertex-Cover.

   (c) Sat.

   (d) Factoring. Given numbers n, k written in binary, output yes iff n is divisible by d for some $1 < d \leq k$.

   (e) Not-Factoring. Given numbers n, k written in binary, output yes iff n is **NOT** divisible by d for any $1 < d \leq k$.

   Hint: The following problem **is solvable** in polynomial time.[1]

   Primes: Given a number n written in binary, output yes iff n is a prime number.

5. **Set-Cover** In the Set-Cover problem, the inputs are

   - a "universe" of elements $U = \{1, \ldots, n\}$
   - m subsets of U: $S_1, \ldots, S_m \subset U$
   - an integer k

   You should output yes if there is a set $T \subseteq \{1, \ldots, m\}$ such that $\bigcup_{i \in T} S_i = T$. In other words, output yes if there is a collection of k subsets, such that every element of the universe is "covered" by one of the subsets.

   Reduce Vertex-Cover $\leq_P$ Set-Cover.

6. Show Sat $\leq_P$ 3-Sat.

[1] This actually wasn't known until 2002, when Agrawal, Kayal, and Saxena created the AKS primality test. Kayal and Saxena were undergraduates at IIT Kanpur at the time; Agrawal was their advisor.