

String Matching Algorithms

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(with basic contributions from M. J. Dinneen, Wikipedia, and web materials by
Ch. Charras and Thierry Lecroq, Russ Cox, David Eppstein, etc.)

COMPSCI 369 Computational Science

- 1 String matching algorithms
- 2 Naïve, or brute-force search
- 3 Automaton search
- 4 Rabin-Karp algorithm
- 5 Knuth-Morris-Pratt algorithm
- 6 Boyer-Moore algorithm
- 7 Other string matching algorithms

Learning outcomes: Be familiar with string matching algorithms

RECOMMENDED READING:

<http://www-igm.univ-mlv.fr/~lecroq/string/index.html>

C. Charras and T. Lecroq: Exact String Matching Algorithms. Univ. de Rouen, 1997

String Matching (Searching)

String matching or **searching** algorithms try to find places where one or several strings (also called **patterns**) are found within a larger string (**searched text**):

```
...try_to_find_places_where_one_or_several_strings_(also...  
PATTERN: ace  
...try_to_find_places_where_one_or_several_strings_(also...
```

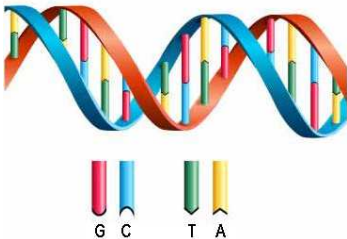
Formally, both the pattern and searched text are concatenation of elements of an **alphabet** (finite set) Σ

- Σ may be a usual human alphabet, for example, the Latin letters a through z or Greek letters α through ω
- Other applications may include binary alphabet, $\Sigma = \{0, 1\}$, or DNA alphabet, $\Sigma = \{A, C, G, T\}$, in bioinformatics

String Searching: DNA alphabet

DNA alphabet contains only four “letters”, forming fixed pairs in the double-helical structure of DNA

- A – adenine: A pairs with T
- C – cytosine: C pairs with G
- G – guanine: G pairs with C
- T - thymine: T pairs with A

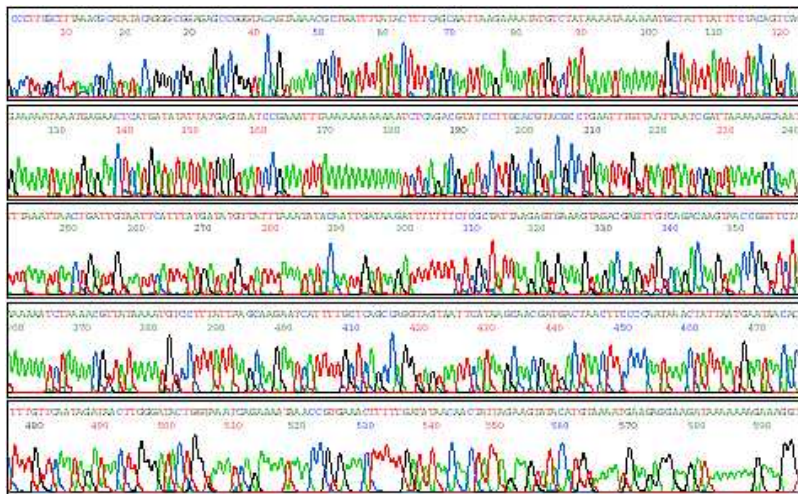


```
GAATTCCTTTGGTATCCAATGAAGAAATCGAATCCATACCCATAGCTATAAAAAACAT
TTCAGGAGAAAAATAAGACCAGGCTGCTCAATTAGGCGCAATTGATTCGTTTCAAATA
GTGAAACTTGCCAGCTTACTTTCGGCATGTCTGGTCATTTTGGAAAAATTCATCTTACT
CAACCATTATTTAAAGTCGCATTTAAAAAATCTGTGGAAAAATTTTTAAATATACTGT
TTCTTTCTCGTGGTGTCTTACAAAACTTTGAACTTTCGGAAATGATCAAGCAGATAGAGC
AACGAAATACTGGAATAACAGTTAAAGATCGTGTCTGCTTTTAAAAAAATTTTGAAGACT
ACCAAAACAAGCAAAATCAAGTGTATTGCACCTAATTCGCAAAAAACAAGTCTCTCCTTT
ACAATATTCGAAAAATAATAACTTATATATAATTCGGGTACTACAAAGGGTATAGTTT
TGGATAACAGGCATGTGTTAATCTTACAAAAATCTCCACAAAACGTTTAAATATTGG
TTAACCCCTTCGAATGCTCATCAAACTGATCTCCGCAAAATGCTTTTATGCTAAGTAA
TATCTTACTTCCACCACATAATCTACGAACATCAATGTTTATGATGGTCAGGTACGA
TTGTGTTAACAAGTGATTTGAATCTGATAATCGCAAGAGTTGCTAATAATGAGACAAAT
GCAAAAAATACAAAAAATCTTGGATTCTATCGATAACAGCCGAGGTGCCAATCCATATGC
TACAAAATAAAAGCTTACTTTGGTACTTTGACAGGTGGCACTCAAAGAAATCTTATT
TGGCAAGTTATATTAATGGCAAACGTATTCCTGAGACTGCCAGAGCTGTAATCGAACCC
TCTATGAATAAACTGGCTTATTTGAAGTACCATCTTACATTTTAAACAAGTAAAGAGA
TGTTGCTTTTATAATCACGTTACGAAAGATAACATACTCAAAGTCTTCAAAGCAAGCA
AAGCTTTTCTAACATATATCAAAGTGATCATAACTTCAAATAATCTTAAATATGGTTAT
GATTTAGCACAGAAATGGATATTTAACCTTGGCTCCTAATTTCCGGTATATTTTCGA
AAAAAGGAAAGGAAAGGTGGTTTGTAACTATTTCGACACATCCATCTATCTGGTTAA
CTAATATCCAATCTGGTATAATAAAAAAGATCAGAAGGGTTTACTATTAACATCCCAACC
ACAATTTGCACATCTTTAATGCTGATTTTGTGAGAGTGAATGACAATATATCTCTT
CAAATCCCATGTGCCAATCTCGAACAAGCTTTGATTATGAATCAGCAAACTCTCTCA
AAAATCTATAACAAGCAATCCAAGTTCGGCTTGGTCCAAGATCAAATCCAGCTGTG
AATAAGTTATATAGACGACAAAATATACATATAAAGATCGGTTGGTGATTTAGGACA
ATTCCGATTTTCGTTAACACCTGGAAGAATAATTTATACCGGAAAGATATACTTTCTT
GTGATTTCCAAAAATATACACTCAAAGGAATGTTGAAAAATGGCGAATCTATTTTG
GAGAATTTTACAAAATAAATCGTTTCCGCAAAATTCCTCAAAGTCCATCTTTGGGATCT
TGTTTTATTTTATGGACAAGAGTATGGTTTGAATATATTTGGATACAATCGCAGATATG
TCTCAAATTTTATACACATTTTGGTTTCAGTGTAAAAATCCGAGATATGATCCCAAGC
CCAAAAATTTTGGATATCTAGAAAAGATCGTAGACCAAGAAGTGGATAAAATTTGATAA
ACAAACAACAACTCTATATGACGATATCGAACAGGTAAGGTTAATAATCAACTCTTATG
ATGATATTTCTGAGTTCAGATTAATAAATGTGGCTTATTAATAAAGAAAGAACTTGAAGG
AACTTTTGGAACTTTGGATGAATATATGATGAAGCAATAATTTCTTAGAGATGTA
TAGAACGGGATATAAGGTCAACATTAACGAATCTCTCTATTATGTGTTTCTCGGGTT
TTAAAAATATGAAAAATACGAAATGATACACCGGGTCTTAATGGTAAAAACATCTTTG
TTTAGCTTACCAGATTTCTATAAATTTACAAGATTTATGGGTTCTCAAAGGCTCTATTGC
CAAAGGGTTAACGTTTGAAGAAATATGCTACAACTGTAAAAACAAGAAGCTTTTCCACAAA
TTGTTAATGTTACAACTGGTACTTACAAAACAGGATTTTTGGGGAAAAAATGGTTAAA
ATGGCTTCTGAATTC
```

http://www.biotechnologyonline.gov.au/popups/img_helix.html

<http://www.insectscience.org/2.10/ref/fig5a.gif>

String Searching: DNA alphabet



http://biology.kenyon.edu/courses/biol114/Chap08/longread_sequence.gif

String Searching (Matching) Problems

<http://www-igm.univ-mlv.fr/~lecroq/string/index.html>

String matching: Find one, or more generally, all the occurrences of a pattern $x = [x_0x_1..x_{m-1}]$; $x_i \in \Sigma$; $i = 0, \dots, m - 1$, in a text (string) $y = [y_0y_1..y_{n-1}]$; $y_j \in \Sigma$; $j = 0, \dots, n - 1$

- Two basic variants:
 - ① Given a pattern, find its occurrences in any initially unknown text
 - Solutions by preprocessing the pattern using finite automata models or combinatorial properties of strings
 - ② Given a text, find occurrences of any initially unknown pattern
 - Solutions by indexing the text with the help of trees or finite automata
- In COMPSCI 369: only algorithms of the first kind
- Algorithms of the second kind: look e.g. at Google. . .

String Matching: Sliding Window Mechanism

- **Sliding window**: Scan the text by a **window** of size, which is generally equal to m
- **An attempt**: Align the left end of the window with the text and compare the characters in the window with those of the pattern
 - Each attempt (step) is associated with position j in the text when the window is positioned on $y_j..y_{j+m-1}$
- **Shift** the window to the right after the whole match of the pattern or after a mismatch

Effectiveness of the search depends on the order of comparisons:

- ① The order is not relevant (e.g. naïve, or brute-force algorithm)
- ② The natural left-to-right order (the reading direction)
- ③ The right-to-left order (the best algorithms in practice)
- ④ A specific order (the best theoretical bounds)

Single Pattern Algorithms (Summary)

Notation:

m – the length (size) of the pattern; n – the length of the searched text

String search algorithm	Time complexity for	
	preprocessing	matching
Naïve	0 (none)	$\Theta(n \cdot m)$
Rabin-Karp	$\Theta(m)$	avg $\Theta(n + m)$ worst $\Theta(n \cdot m)$
Finite state automaton	$\Theta(m \Sigma)$	$\Theta(n)$
Knuth-Morris-Pratt	$\Theta(m)$	$\Theta(n)$
Boyer-Moore	$\Theta(m + \Sigma)$	$\Omega(n/m), O(n)$
Bit based (approximate)	$\Theta(m + \Sigma)$	$\Theta(n)$

See <http://www-igm.univ-mlv.fr/~lecroq/string> for some animations of these and many other string algorithms

Naïve (Brute-Force) Algorithm

```
for ( j = 0; j <= n - m; j++ ) {  
    for ( i = 0; i < m && x[i] == y[i + j]; i++ );  
    if ( i >= m ) return j;  
}
```

Main features of this easy (but slow) $O(nm)$ algorithm:

- No preprocessing phase
- Only constant extra space needed
- Always shifts the window by exactly 1 position to the right
- Comparisons can be done in any order
- mn expected text characters comparisons

Naïve Algorithm: An Example

Pattern: **abaa**; searched string: **ababbaabaaab**

ababbaabaaab

.....

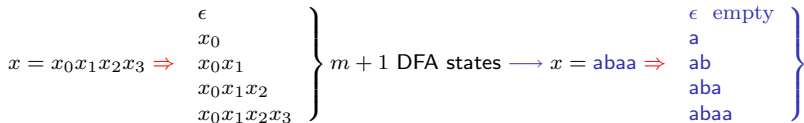
abaa_____	step 1	ABA#	mismatch: 4th letter
_abaa_____	step 2	_#...	mismatch: 1st letter
__abaa_____	step 3	__AB#.	mismatch: 3rd letter
___abaa_____	step 4	___#...	mismatch: 1st letter
____abaa_____	step 5	____#...	mismatch: 1st letter
_____abaa___	step 6	_____A#..	mismatch: 2nd letter
_____abaa__	step 7	_____ABAA	success
_____abaa_	step 8	_____#...	mismatch: 1st letter
_____abaa	step 9	_____.#..	mismatch: 2nd letter

Runs with 9 window steps and 18 character comparisons

Automaton Based Search

Main features:

- Building the minimal deterministic finite automaton (DFA) accepting strings from the language $L = \Sigma^*x$
 - L is the set of all strings of characters from Σ ending with the pattern x
 - Time complexity $O(m|\Sigma|)$ of this preprocessing ($m = |x|$, i.e. the size of x)
- Time complexity $O(n)$ of the search in a string y of size n if the DFA is stored in a direct access table
- Most suitable for searching within many different strings y for same given pattern x



Building the Minimal DFA for $L = \Sigma^*x$

- The DFA $(Q, \Sigma, \delta : Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q, q_0 \in Q, F \subseteq Q)$ to recognise the language $L = \Sigma^*x$:

- Q – the set of all the prefixes of $x = x_0 \cdots x_{m-1}$:

$$Q = \{\epsilon, x_0, x_0x_1, \dots, x_0 \cdots x_{m-2}, x_0 \cdots x_{m-1}\}$$

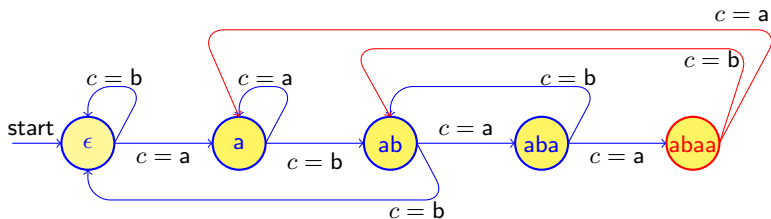
- $q_0 = \epsilon$ – the state representing the empty prefix
- $F = \{x\}$ – the state representing the pattern(s) x
- δ – the state+character to state transition function
 - For $q \in Q$ and $c \in \Sigma$, $\delta(q, c) = qc$ if and only if $qc \in Q$
 - Otherwise $\delta(q, c) = p$ such that p is the longest suffix of qc , which is a prefix of x (i.e. $p \in Q$)
- Once the DFA is built, searching for the word x in a text y consists of parsing y with the DFA beginning with the initial state q_0
- Each time a unique final state F is encountered an occurrence of x is reported

Automaton Search: $x = abaa$ and $y = ababbaabaaab$

$\Sigma = \{a, b\}$; $Q = \{\epsilon, a, ab, aba, abaa\}$; $q_0 = \epsilon$; $F = \{x\} = \{abaa\}$

Transitions $\delta(q, c)$:

$c \backslash q$	ϵ	a	ab	aba	abaa
a	a	a	aba	abaa	a
b	ϵ	ab	ϵ	ab	ab



See also: <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~eppstein/161/960222.html>

Automaton Search: $x = abaa$ and $y = ababbaabaaab$

Automaton:

Initial state ϵ

Final states $\{abaa\}$

Transitions

$q_{\text{next}} = \delta(q_{\text{curr}}, c) =$

$q_{\text{curr}} \setminus c$	a	b
ϵ	a	ϵ
a	a	ab
ab	aba	ϵ
aba	abaa	ab
abaa	a	ab

STEP	TEXT	TRANSITION	
1	a babbaabaaab	ϵ	\rightarrow a
2	<u>a</u> b abbaabaaab	a	\rightarrow ab
3	<u>ab</u> a bbbaabaaab	ab	\rightarrow aba
4	<u>aba</u> b baabaaab	aba	\rightarrow ab
5	ab <u>ab</u> b aabaaab	ab	\rightarrow ϵ
6	abab <u>ba</u> abaaab	ϵ	\rightarrow a
7	ababba <u>a</u> baaab	a	\rightarrow a
8	ababbaa <u>b</u> aaab	a	\rightarrow ab
9	ababbaa <u>ab</u> aaab	ab	\rightarrow aba
10	ababbaa <u>aba</u> aab	aba	\rightarrow abaa
11	ababba <u>abaa</u> ab	abaa	\rightarrow a
12	ababba <u>abaa</u> a b	a	\rightarrow ab

Runs with 12 steps and 12 character comparisons

Rabin-Karp Algorithm

Main features:

- Using hashing function
(i.e., it is more efficient to check whether the window contents “looks like” the pattern than checking exact match)
- Preprocessing phase: time complexity $O(m)$ and constant space
- Searching phase time complexity:
 - $O(mn)$ for worst case
 - $O(n + m)$ for expected case
- Good for multiple patterns x being used

Rabin-Karp Hashing Details

Desirable hashing functions $\text{hash}(\dots)$ for string matching:

- Efficiency of computation
- High discrimination for strings
- Easy computation of $\text{hash}(y_{j+1}..y_{j+m})$ from the previous window:
i.e. $\text{hash}(y_{j+1}..y_{j+m}) = \text{rehash}(y_j, y_{j+m}, \text{hash}(y_j..y_{j+m-1}))$

For a word w of length m , let $\text{hash}(w)$ be defined as:

$$\text{hash}(w_0..w_{m-1}) = (w_0 2^{m-1} + w_1 2^{m-2} + \dots + w_{m-1} 2^0) \bmod q$$

where q is a large number. Then $\text{rehash}(a, b, h) = (2h - a 2^m + b) \bmod q$

- Preprocessing phase: computing $\text{hash}(x)$
 - It can be done in constant space and $O(m)$ time
- Searching phase: comparing $\text{hash}(x)$ with $\text{hash}(y_j..y_{j+m-1})$ for $0 \leq j < n - m$
 - If an equality is found, still check the equality $x = y_j..y_{j+m-1}$ character by character

Rabin-Karp Algorithm

Using external hash and rehash functions:

```
int RabinKarp(String x, String y)
{
    m = x.length();
    n = y.length();
    hx = hash(x,0,m-1);
    hy = hash(y,0,m-1);
    for (int j = 0; j <= n - m; j++)
    {
        if (hx==hy && y.substring(j,j+m-1)==x) return j;
        hy = rehash(y[j],y[j+m],hy);
    }
    return -1; // not found
}
```

Rabin-Karp with $x = \text{abaa}$ and $y = \text{ababbaabaaab}$

hash(abaa)	= 1459	→ hx – hash value for pattern x
	hy ↓	→ hash value for substring y
hash($y_0..y_3$)	= 1460	ababbaabaaab
hash($y_1..y_4$)	= 1466	ababbaabaaab
hash($y_2..y_5$)	= 1461	ababbaabaaab
hash($y_3..y_6$)	= 1467	ababbaabaaab
hash($y_4..y_7$)	= 1464	ababbaabaaab
hash($y_5..y_8$)	= 1457	ababbaabaaab
hash($y_6..y_9$)	= 1459	ababbaabaaab : return 6
hash($y_7..y_{10}$)	= 1463	ababbaabaaab
hash($y_8..y_{11}$)	= 1456	ababbaabaaab

Rabin-Karp Algorithm (searching multiple patterns)

Extending the search for multiple patterns of the *same* length:

```
void RabinKarpMult(String[] x, String y)
{
    m = x[0].length();
    n = y.length();
    for( int i = 0; i < x.length; i++ )
        hx[i] = hash( x[i], 0, m-1);
    hy = hash(y, 0, m-1);
    for( int j = 0; j <= n - m; j ++ ) {
        for( int k = 0; k < x.length; k++ )
            if ( hx[k]==hy && y.substring(j,j+m-1) == x[k] )
                matchProcess( k, j );
        hy = rehash( y[j], y[j+m], hy );
    }
}
```

Knuth-Morris-Pratt Algorithm

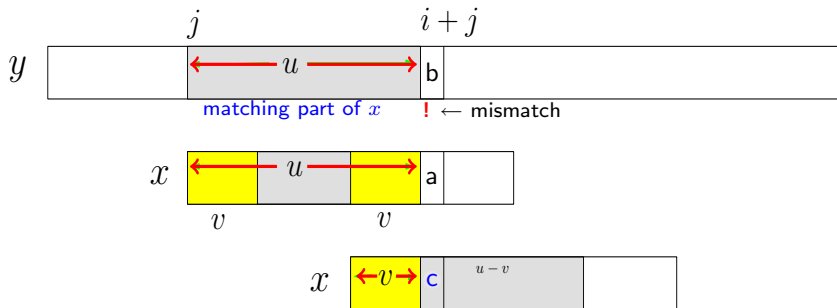
Searches for occurrences of a pattern x within a main text string y by employing the simple observation: *after a mismatch, the word itself allows us to determine where to begin the next match to bypass re-examination of previously matched characters*

- Preprocessing phase: $O(m)$ space and time complexity
- Searching phase: $O(n + m)$ time complexity (independent from the alphabet size)
- At most $2n - 1$ character comparisons during the text scan
- The maximum number of comparisons for a single text character: $\leq \log_{\eta} m$ where $\eta = \frac{1+\sqrt{5}}{2}$ is the golden ratio

The algorithm was invented in 1977 by Knuth and Pratt and independently by Morris, but the three published it jointly

Knuth-Morris-Pratt Window Shift Idea

Let offset i ; $0 < i < m$, be the first mismatched position for a pattern x matched to the text string y starting at index position j (i.e. $x_0..x_{i-1} = y_j..y_{j+i-1} = u$, but $x_i = a \neq y_{j+i} = b$):



The length of the largest substring v being a prefix and suffix of u , which are followed by different characters (like va and vc above), gives the next search index `next[i]`

Knuth-Morris-Pratt Preprocessing

All the shift distances $\text{next}[i]$ can be actually computed for $0 \leq i \leq m$ in total time $O(m)$ where $m = |x|$

```
void computeNext( String x, int[] next ) {
    int i = 0;
    int j = next[0] = -1; // end of window marker
    while ( i < x.length() ) {
        while ( j > -1 && x[i] != x[j] ) j = next[ j ];
        i++;
        j++;
        if ( x[ i ] == x[ j ] )
            next[ i ] = next[ j ];
        else next[ i ] = j;
    }
}
```

Knuth-Morris-Pratt Main Algorithm

The main search runs in time $O(n)$ where $n = |y|$.

```
int KMP(String x, String y) {
    int m = x.length(); int n = y.length();
    int[ m+1 ] next;
    computeNext( x, next );
    int i = 0; int j = 0;    // indices in x and y
    while ( j < n ) {
        while ( i > -1 && x[i] != y[j] ) i = next[ i ];
        i++;
        j++;
        if ( i >= m ) return j - i; // Match
    }
    return -1; // Mismatch
}
```

So the total time of the KMP algorithm is $O(m + n)$

KMP with $x = abaa$ and $y = ababbaabaaab$

Preprocessing phase:

x	a	b	a	a	-
i	0	1	2	3	4
$next[i]$	-1	0	-1	1	1

Searching phase:

ababbaabaaab

ABaa Shift by 2 ($next[3]=1$)

.Ba. Shift by 3 ($next[2]=-1$)

Ab.. Shift by 1 ($next[1]=0$)

ABAA Shift by 3 (match found)

Boyer-Moore Algorithm

Main features of this “best practical choice” algorithm:

- Performing the comparisons from right to left
- Preprocessing phase: $O(m + |\Sigma|)$ time and space complexity
- Searching phase: $O(m + n)$ time complexity;
- $3n$ text character comparisons in the worst case when searching for a non periodic pattern
- $O(n/m)$ best performance

Two precomputed functions to shift the window to the right:

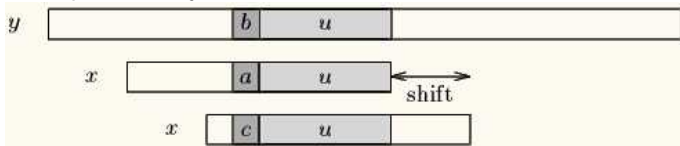
- The **good-suffix shift** (also called *matching shift*)
- The **bad-character shift** (also called *occurrence shift*)

Good-Suffix (Matching) Shifts

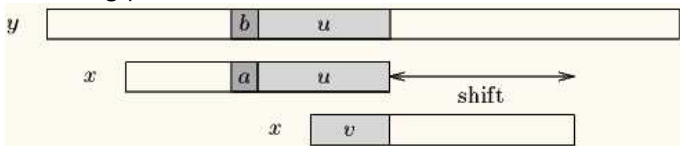
A mismatch $x_i \neq y_{j+i}$ for a matching attempt at position j , so that

$$x_{i+1}..x_{m-1} = y_{j+i+1}..y_{j+m-1} = u$$

The shift: by aligning the segment u in y with its rightmost occurrence in x that is preceded by a character different from x_i :



or if no such segment in x exists, by aligning the longest suffix of u in y with a matching prefix v of x :



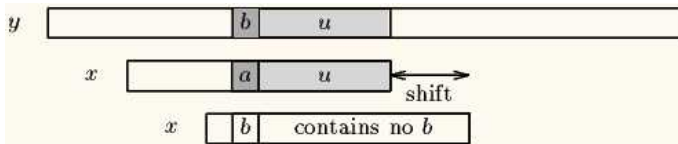
See details in <http://www-igm.univ-mlv.fr/~lecroq/string/index.html>

Bad-Character (Occurrence) Shifts

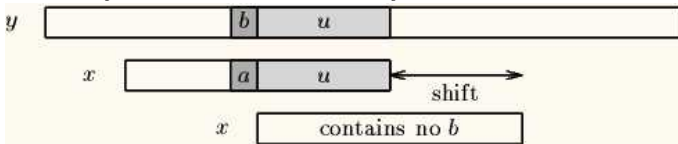
A mismatch $x_i \neq y_{j+i}$ for a matching attempt at position j , so that

$$x_{i+1}..x_{m-1} = y_{j+i+1}..y_{j+m-1} = u$$

The shift: by aligning the text character y_{i+j} with its rightmost occurrence in $x_0..x_{m-2}$:



or if y_{j+i} does not occur in x , the left end of the window is aligned with the character y_{j+i+1} immediately after y_{j+i} :



See details in <http://www-igm.univ-mlv.fr/~lecroq/string/index.html>

Boyer-Moore with $x = \text{abaa}$ and $y = \text{ababbaabaaab}$

Bad-character shifts $Bc[a]=1$ and $Bc[b]=2$.

Good-suffix shifts G_s are 3, 3, 1, and 2, respectively.

ababbaabaaab

...a Shift by 2

..aA Shift by 1

aBAA Shift by 3

ABAA Shift by 3

Shift-AND Matching Algorithm

Also known as the **Baeza-Yates–Gonnet** algorithm and is related to the **Wu-Manber** k -differences algorithm.

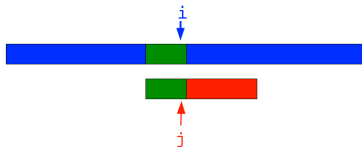
The main features of this **bit based** algorithm are:

- efficient if the pattern length is no longer than the memory-word size of the machine;
- preprocessing phase in $O(m + |\Sigma|)$ time and space complexity;
- searching phase in $O(n)$ time complexity;
- adapts easily to approximate string matching.

Shift-AND Matching Algorithm (continued)

Algorithm uses (for fixed i) a state vector \hat{s} , where

$$s[j] = 1 \text{ iff } y[i - j, \dots, i] = x[0, \dots, j]$$



For $c \in \Sigma$ let $T[c]$ be a (Boolean) bit vector of length $m = |x|$ that indicates where c occurs in x .

The next state vector at positions $i + 1$ is computed very fast:

$$\hat{s} = ((\hat{s} \ll 1) + 1) \& T[y[i + 1]]$$

A match is found whenever $s[m - 1] = 1$.

Shift-AND with $X=abaa$ and $Y=ababbaabaaab$

The character vectors for the pattern x are:

$x \setminus T[]$	a	b
a	1	0
b	0	1
a	1	0
a	1	0

The main search progresses as follows:

$x \setminus s[]$	a	b	a	b	b	a	a	b	a	a	a	b
a	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
b	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
a	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

Wu-Manber Approximation Matching Algorithm

The **Shift-AND** algorithm can be modified to detect string matching with at most k errors (or k differences).

The possibilities for matching $x[0, \dots, j]$ with a substring of y that ends at position i with e errors:

- 1 *Match*: $x[j] = y[i]$ and a match with e errors between $x[0, \dots, j - 1]$ and a substring of y ending at $i - 1$.
- 2 *Substitution*: a match with $e - 1$ errors between $x[0, \dots, j - 1]$ and a substring of y ending at $i - 1$.
- 3 *Insertion*: a match with $e - 1$ errors between $x[0, \dots, j]$ and a substring of y ending at $i - 1$.
- 4 *Deletion*: a match with $e - 1$ errors between $x[0, \dots, j - 1]$ and a substring of y ending at i .

Wu-Manber State Update Procedure

We introduce new state vectors \hat{s}_e that represent the matches where $0 \leq e \leq k$ errors have occurred. [Note: $\hat{s} = \hat{s}_0$.]

The state updating is a generalization of the **Shift-AND** rule:

$$s'_e = (((s_e \ll 1) + 1) \mathbf{AND} T[y[i + 1]]) \mathbf{OR} \\ ((s_{e-1} \ll 1) + 1) \mathbf{OR} \\ ((s'_{e-1} \ll 1) + 1) \mathbf{OR} \\ s_{e-1}$$

Here, the s_* and s'_* denote the state at character position i and $i + 1$, respectively, of the text string y

The **OR**'s in the above rule account for the 4 possible ways to approximate the pattern with errors