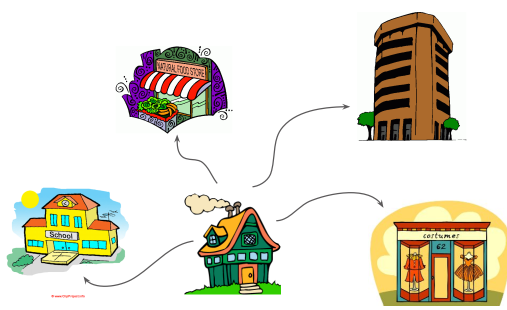
Reductions, Self-Similarity, and Recursion

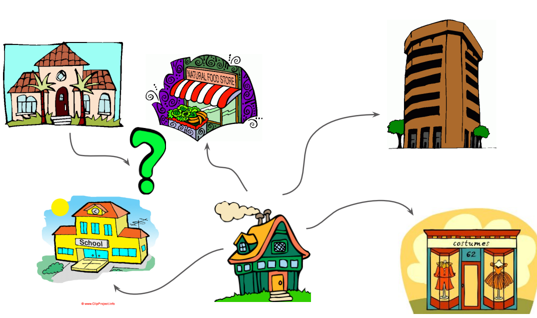
Relations between problems

Notes for CSC 100 - The Beauty and Joy of Computing
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

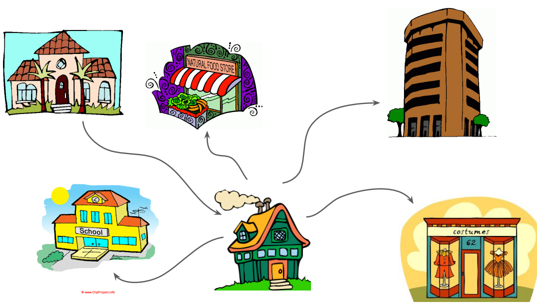
Getting to places from my house...



Now I buy a new house!



Get anywhere by first going to old house



Things to notice...

What I want to do...

I can *go anywhere from my new house* by

1. Going to my old house
2. Going to my destination from there

What I know how to do...

Things to notice...

What I want to do...

I can *go anywhere from my new house* by

1. Going to my old house
2. Going to my destination from there

What I know how to do...

Terminology: I have *reduced the problem of traveling from my new house to the problem of traveling from my old house*.

Important points:

- Solution is easy to produce (often easier than direct solution)
- Solution is easy and compact to describe
- Solution may *not* be the most efficient to execute

Things to notice...

What I want to do...

I can *go anywhere from my new house* by

1. Going to my old house
2. Going to my destination from there

What I know how to do...

Question: Is a reduction a property of problems or algorithms?

Things to notice...

Problem

I can *go anywhere from my new house* by

1. Going to my old house
2. *Going to my destination from there*

Problem

Reductions are between *problems*

- The reduction operation is an algorithm
- Abstraction: We don't care how the "known algorithm" works!

The Basics

A *reduction* is using the solution of one problem (problem A) to solve another problem (problem B).

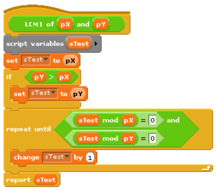
We say "problem B is reduced to problem A".

Reductions are a fundamental "big idea" in computer science

- Lots of types of reductions - you could spend a lifetime studying this!
- Our reductions use a small amount of work in addition to a constant number of calls to problem A.
  - As a result, can say problem B is not much harder than problem A
  - True even if we don't know the most efficient way to solve problem A!

An example from Lab 4

To find least common multiple (LCM):



An example from Lab 4

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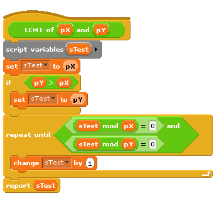
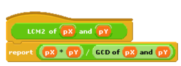


But if you already have GCD



What have we done? We have *reduced the problem of computing LCM to the problem of computing GCD*.

An example from Lab 4

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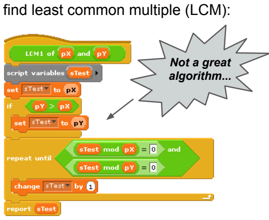

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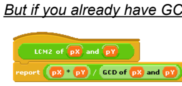


What have we done? We have *reduced the problem of computing LCM to the problem of computing GCD*.

So: LCM is no harder computationally than GCD. And remember... Euler's algorithm is a very efficient GCD algorithm!

Similarity and Self-Similarity

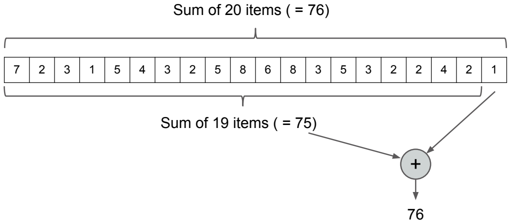
Reducing LCM to GCD identifies similarities between the two problems.

Many problems are structured so that solutions are "self-similar" - large solutions contain solutions to smaller versions of the same problem!

Example: Recall sum of list items as parallel algorithm - each thread solved a smaller version of the same problem!

An algorithm can solve a large problem by breaking it down to smaller versions of the same problem - this is called *recursion*.

Example: Adding up a list



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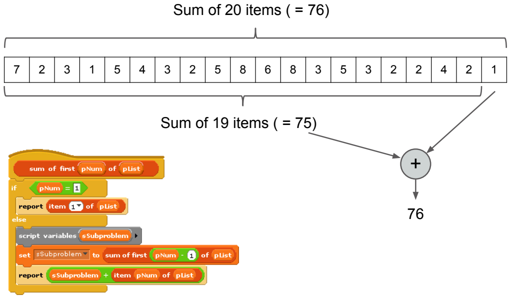
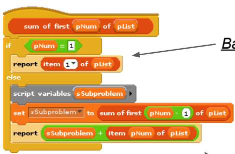


Breaking it down



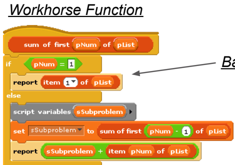
Base case: Handling smallest case directly

Recursive case: Solving a smaller version of the same problem.

Constant amount of work to use answer from subproblem to compute answer to overall problem.

Breaking it down

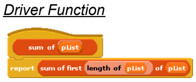
Workhorse Function



Base case: Handling smallest case directly

Recursive case: Solving a smaller version of the same problem.

Driver Function

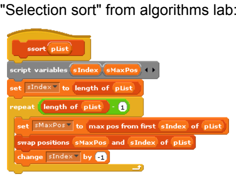


Constant amount of work to use answer from subproblem to compute answer to overall problem.

Driver function: sets up first call to recursion

Another example: Sorting

"Selection sort" from algorithms lab:



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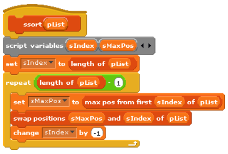
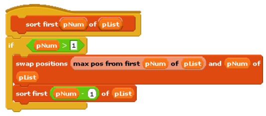


Recursive version:



Base case: One item - nothing to do!

Setting up recursion: Swap max item to last position

Recursion: Sort all the rest

Summary

Finding relations between problems can simplify solutions:

- Sometimes relations between different problems (reductions)
- Sometimes relation to smaller version of the same problem (recursion)

What you should know:

- Recognize reductions and recursion
- Understand the basic principles

We will explore this more in this week's lab!