

National University of Singapore
 School of Computing
 CS3245: Information Retrieval
 Tutorial 2

Boolean Retrieval, Postings Lists and Choosing Terms

Readings: IIR, Chapters 1 & 2

1. Give the best strategy for calculating the following query:

(Singapore AND University AND National) OR (NUS AND NOT Nanyang AND NOT Management)

Obtain frequency counts for the individual terms from your favorite search engine. Treat the counts as the postings size for a Boolean search. Use a search for “the” to estimate the size of all documents in the search engine’s index (which you will need for processing NOT. Note: you may need to make some assumptions about how to calculate the resulting size of conjunctive queries).

2. In lecture, we introduced the notion of **skip pointers**, to save on the number of comparisons needed to create the intersection listing for AND queries.
 - (a) Skip pointers work for AND queries. Do they work for queries that exclusively have OR or NOT?
 - (b) Does the use of skip pointers help in reducing the computational complexity of the intersection operation from $O(n + m)$?
 - (c) Describe a configuration of two query terms n and m in which we would expect skip pointers to be utilized. Also describe the converse: describe a configuration of two query terms n and m in which we would be certain no skip pointers would be used.

3. Positional index.

- (a) The standard positional index’s structure is shown in Figure 2.11 of IIR, partially reproduced below, just showing the entry for “to” with 993,427 documents that match:

to, 993427:
 (1,6: (7,18,33,72,86,231);
 2,5: (1,17,74,222,255);
 4,5: (8,16,190,429,433);
 5,2: (363,367);
 7,3: (13,22,191); ...)

What if we flattened the positional list and stored position and document ID as a two-tuple (*e.g.*, $\langle docId, position \rangle$), throwing away the frequency within the document. Describe how the above postings list for “to” would look like. Would this format be preferable to the standard positional index described above? Describe the benefits/weaknesses of these two data structure formats, assuming that every number takes the same number of bytes to encode.

- (b) Would skip lists be useful inside the positional lists' encoding? Why or why not?

4. Choosing terms.

- (a) Stemming, case folding and eliminating stop words all have an impact on the size of the index. Rank these three methodologies in terms of how much space they may save with respect to the entire index for English. Justify your answers.
- (b) The textbook describes problems with some queries when they undergo normalization. Describe at least two “academic” queries that would have such problems. Do a search on your favorite search engine and on LINC and see whether the problem that you describe manifests or not.
- (c) Two companies have merged and their intranet search engines need to be merged together to form a single search engine. You have the dictionary and postings from both engines at your disposal. Can you simply merge the two dictionaries and postings files together? Why or why not? Describe in full.