

CS 2710 Foundations of AI
Lecture 2

Problem solving by searching

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Example

- Assume a problem of computing the roots of the quadratic equation

$$ax^2 + bx + c = 0$$

Do you consider it a challenging problem?

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Example

- Assume a problem of computing the roots of the quadratic equation

$$ax^2 + bx + c = 0$$

Do you consider it a challenging problem?

Hardly we just apply the standard formula:

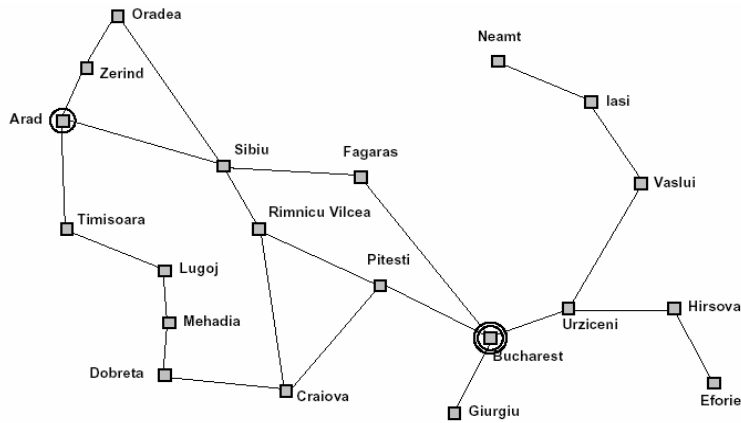
$$x_{1,2} = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

Solving problems by searching

- Some problems have a straightforward solution
 - Just apply the formula, or follow a standardized procedure
 - Example:** solution of the quadratic equation
 - Hardly a sign of intelligence
- More interesting problems require **search**:
 - more than one possible alternative needs to be explored before the problem is solved
 - the number of alternatives to search among can be very large, even infinite.

Search example: Traveler problem

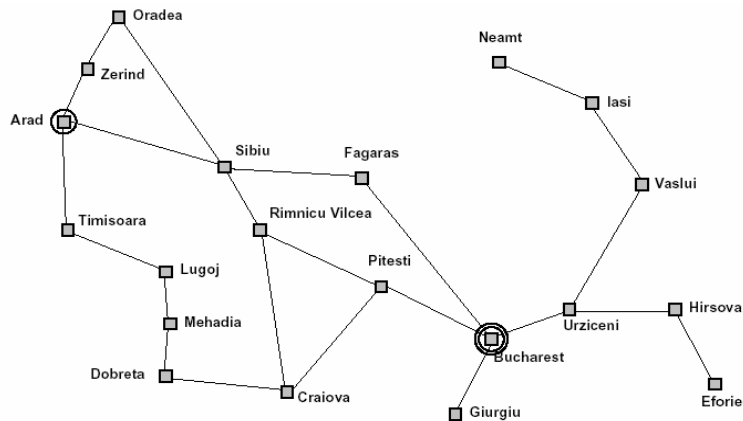
- Find a route from one city (Arad) to the other (Bucharest)



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Example. Traveler problem

- Another flavor of the traveler problem:
 - find the route with the minimum length between S and T



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Example. Puzzle 8.

- Find the sequence of the empty tile moves from the initial game position to the designated target position

Initial position

4	5	
6	1	8
7	3	2

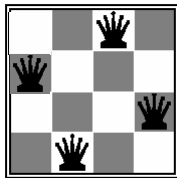
Goal position

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

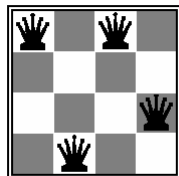
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Example. N-queens problem.

Find a configuration of n queens not attacking each other



Goal configuration



Bad goal configuration

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A search problem

is defined by:

- **Search space:**

- The set of objects among which we search for the solution
Example: objects = routes between cities, or N-queen configurations

- **Goal condition**

- What are the characteristics of the object we want to find in the search space?
- Examples:
 - Path between cities A and B
 - Path between A and B with the smallest number of links
 - Path between A and B with the shortest distance
 - Non-attacking n-queen configuration

Search

- **Search (process)**

- The process of exploration of the search space

- **The efficiency of the search depends on:**

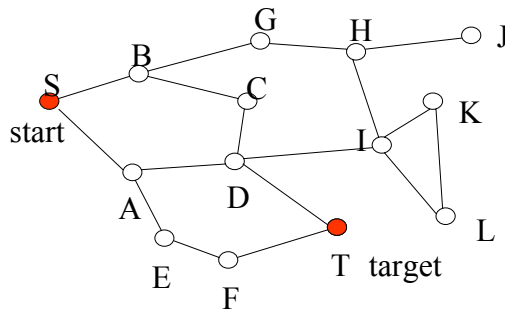
- The search space and its size
- Method used to explore (traverse) the search space
- Condition to test the satisfaction of the search objective
(what it takes to determine I found the desired goal object)

- **Important to remember !!!**

- Conveniently chosen **search space** and the **exploration policy** can have a profound effect on the efficiency

Graph search

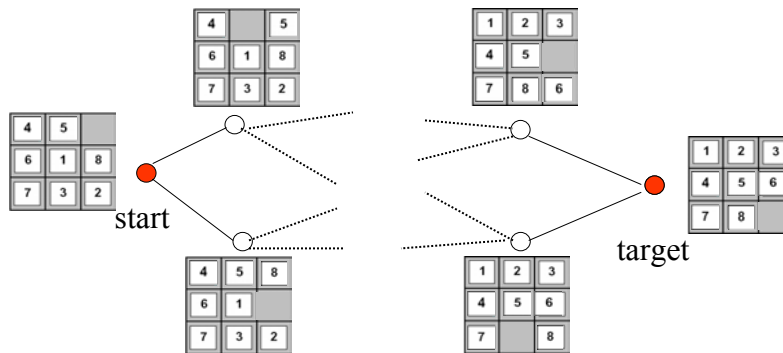
- Many search problems can be naturally represented as **graph search problems**
- **Typical example: Route finding**
 - Map corresponds to the graph, nodes to cities, links to available connections between cities
 - **Goal:** find a route (path) in the graph from S to T



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Graph search

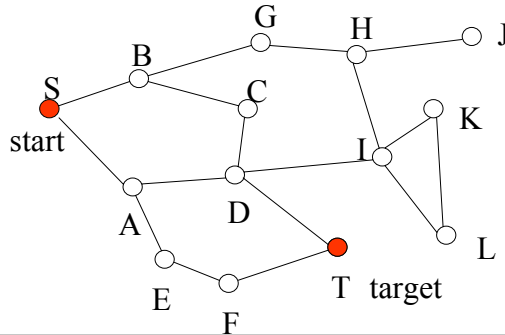
- **Less obvious conversion:**
- **Puzzle 8.** Find a sequence of moves from the initial configuration to the goal configuration.
 - nodes corresponds to states of the game,
 - links to valid moves made by the player



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Graph search problem

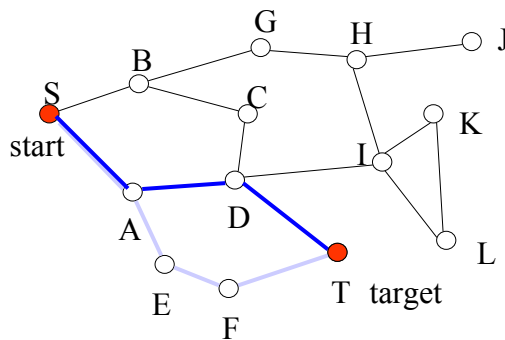
- **States** - game positions, or locations in the map that are represented by nodes in the graph
- **Operators** - connections between cities, valid moves
- **Initial state** – start position, start city
- **Goal state** – target position (positions), target city (cities)



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Graph search

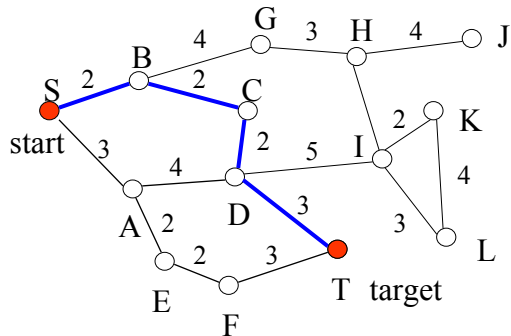
- **More complex versions of the graph search problems:**
 - Find a minimal length path
(= route with the smallest number of connections, the shortest sequence of moves that solves Puzzle 8)



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Graph search

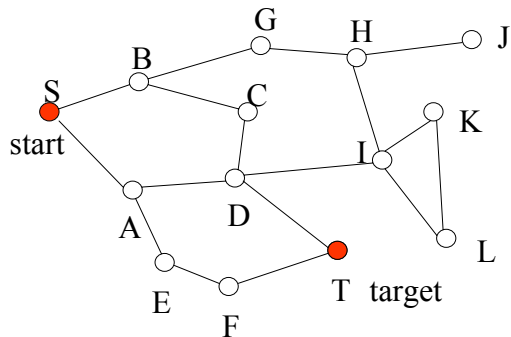
- **More complex versions of the graph search problems:**
 - Find a minimum cost path
(= a route with the shortest distance)



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Graph search

- How to find the path between S and T ?
- **A strawman solution:**
 - Generate systematically all sequences of 1, 2, 3, ... edges
 - Check if the sequence yields a path between S and T.
- Can we do better?

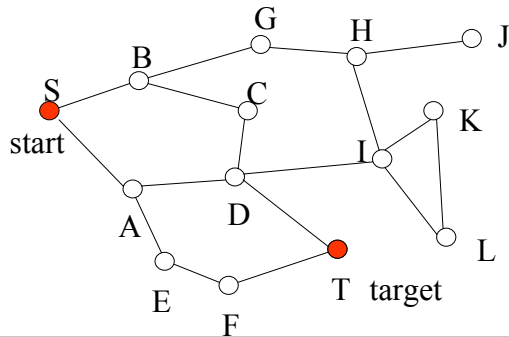


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Graph search

Can we do better?

- We are not interested in sequences that do not start in S and that are not valid paths
- **Solution:**
 - ?

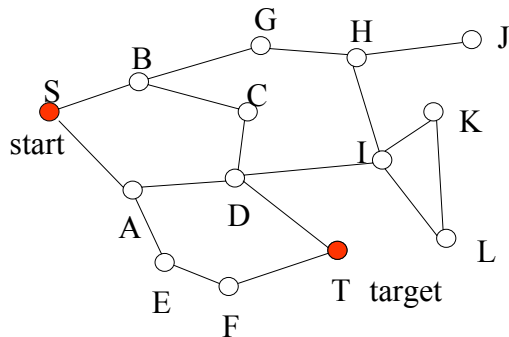


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Graph search

Can we do better?

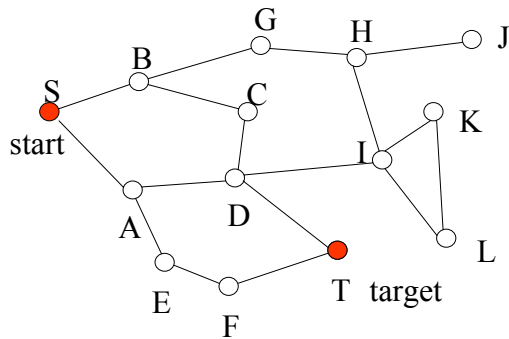
- We are not interested in sequences that do not start in S and that are not valid paths
- **Solution:**
 - Look only on valid paths starting from S



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Graph search

- Being smarter about the space we search for the solution pays off in terms of search process efficiency.

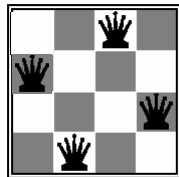


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N-queens

Some problems can be converted to the graph search problems

- **But some problems are harder and less intuitive**
 - Take e.g. N-queens problem.



Goal configuration

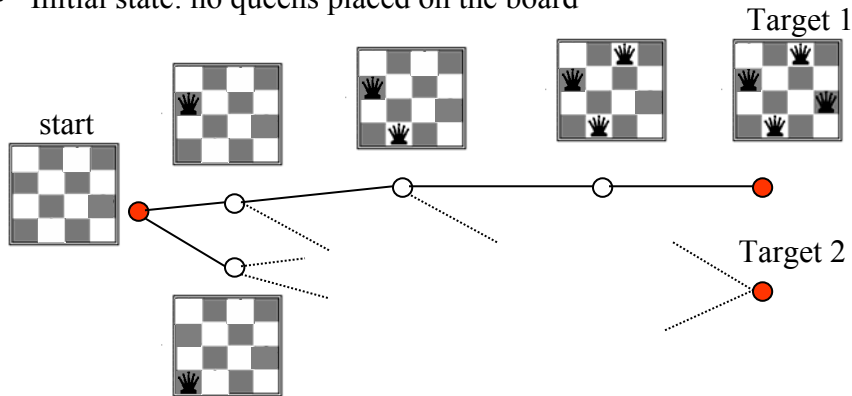
- **Problem:**
 - We look for a configuration, not a sequence of moves
 - No distinguished initial state, no operators (moves)

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Graph search

A **trick**: generate a configuration step by step (one queen per step)

- States (nodes) correspond to configurations of 0,1,2,3,4 queens
- Links (operators) correspond to the addition of a queen
- Initial state: no queens placed on the board



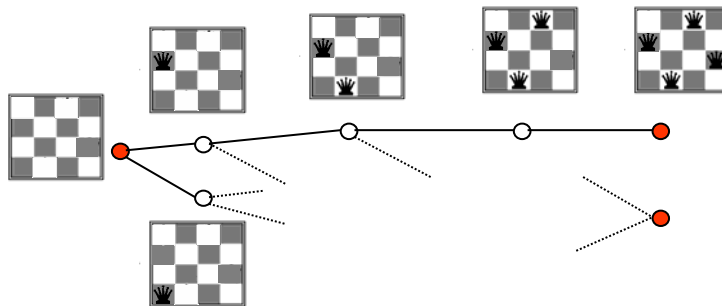
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Graph search

N-queens problems

- This is a different graph search problem when compared to Puzzle 8 or Route planning:

We want to find only the target configuration, not a path



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Two types of graph search problems

- **Path search**
 - Find a path between states S and T
 - **Example:** traveler problem, Puzzle 8
 - **Additional goal criterion:** minimum length (cost) path
- **Configuration search (constraint satisfaction search)**
 - Find a state (configuration) satisfying the goal condition
 - **Example:** n-queens problem, design of a device with a predefined functionality
 - **Additional goal criterion:** “soft” preferences for configurations, e.g. minimum cost design

Search problem

Search problems that can be represented or converted into a graph search problems can be defined in terms of:

- **Initial state**
 - State (configuration) we start to search from (e.g. start city, initial game position)
- **Operators:**
 - Transform one state to another (e.g. valid connections between cities, valid moves in Puzzle 8)
- **Goal condition:**
 - Defines the target state (destination, winning position)
- **Search space** (the set of objects we search for the solution) :
 - is now defined indirectly through:
the initial state + operators

Traveler problem.

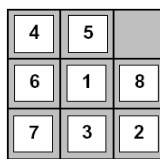


Traveler problem formulation:

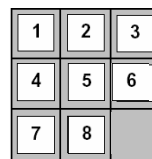
- **States:** different cities
- **Initial state:** city Arad
- **Operators:** moves to cities in the neighborhood
- **Goal condition:** city Bucharest
- **Type of the problem:** path search
- **Possible solution cost:** path length

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Puzzle 8 example



Initial state



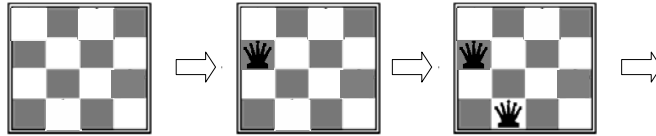
Goal state

Search problem formulation:

- **States:** tile configurations
- **Initial state:** initial configuration
- **Operators:** moves of the empty tile
- **Goal:** reach the winning configuration
- **Type of the problem:** path search
- **Possible solution cost:** a number of moves

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N-queens problem



Initial configuration

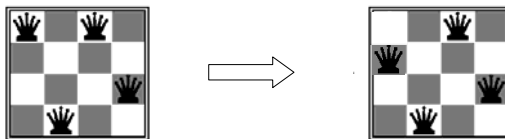
Problem formulation:

- **States:** configurations of 0 to 4 queens on the board
- **Initial state:** no-queen configuration
- **Operators:** add a queen to the leftmost unoccupied column
- **Goal:** a configuration with 4 non-attacking queens
- **Type of the problem:** configuration search

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N-queens problem

Alternative formulation of N-queens problem



Bad goal configuration

Valid goal configuration

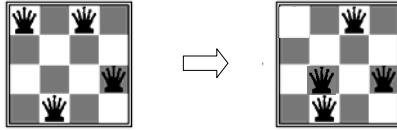
Problem formulation:

- **States:** different configurations of 4 queens on the board
- **Initial state:** an arbitrary configuration of 4 queens
- **Operators:** move one queen to a different unoccupied position
- **Goal:** a configuration with non-attacking queens
- **Type of the problem:** configuration search

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Comparison of two problem formulations

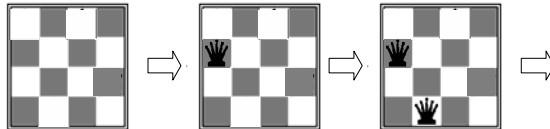
Solution 2:



Operators: switch one of the queens

$$\binom{16}{4} - \text{all configurations}$$

Solution 1:

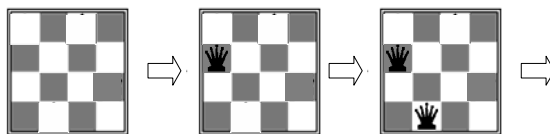


Operators: add a queen to the leftmost unoccupied column

$$1 + 4 + 4^2 + 4^3 + 4^4 < 4^5 - \text{configurations altogether}$$

Even better solution to the N-queens

Solution 1:



Operators: add a queen to the leftmost unoccupied column

$$< 4^5 - \text{configurations altogether}$$

Improved solution with a smaller search space

Operators: add a queen to the leftmost unoccupied column
such that it does not attack already placed queens

$$\leq 1 + 4 + 4 * 3 + 4 * 3 * 2 + 4 * 3 * 2 * 1 = 65$$

- configurations altogether

Formulating a search problem

- **Search (process)**
 - The process of exploration of the search space
- **The efficiency of the search depends on:**
 - The search space and its size
 - Method used to explore (traverse) the search space
 - Condition to test the satisfaction of the search objective
(what it takes to determine I found the desired goal object)
- **Think twice before solving the problem by search:**
 - Choose the **search space** and the **exploration policy**