

# CMSC 132: Object-Oriented Programming II

---



## Recursive Algorithms

**Department of Computer Science**  
**University of Maryland, College Park**

# Recursion

- Recursion is a strategy for solving problems

- A procedure that calls itself

- Approach

If ( problem instance is simple / trivial )

Solve it directly

Else

1. Simplify problem instance into **smaller** instance(s) of the original problem
2. Solve smaller instance using same algorithm
3. Combine solution(s) to solve original problem

# Recursive Algorithm Format

## 1. Base case

- Solve small problem directly

## 2. Recursive step

- Simplify problem into smaller subproblem(s)
- Recursively apply algorithm to subproblem(s)
- Calculate overall solution

# Example – Factorial

## ■ Factorial definition

- $n! = n \times n-1 \times n-2 \times n-3 \times \dots \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$

- $0! = 1$

## ■ To calculate factorial of $n$

- Base case

- If  $n = 0$ , return 1

- Recursive step

- Calculate the factorial of  $n-1$

- Return  $n \times (\text{the factorial of } n-1)$

# Example – Factorial

## ■ Code

```
int fact ( int n ) {  
    if ( n == 0 ) return 1;           // base case  
    return n * fact(n-1);             // recursive step  
}
```

# Properties

- **Recursion relies on the call stack**
  - **State of current procedure is saved when procedure is recursively invoked**
  - **Every procedure invocation gets own stack space**
- **Any problem solvable with recursion may be solved with iteration (and vice versa)**
  - **Use iteration with explicit stack to store state**
  - **Algorithm may be simpler for one approach**

# Recursion vs. Iteration

## ■ Recursive algorithm

```
int fact ( int n ) {  
    if ( n == 0 ) return 1;  
    return n * fact(n-1);  
}
```

## ■ Iterative algorithm

```
int fact ( int n ) {  
    int i, res;  
    res = 1;  
    for (i=n; i>0; i--) {  
        res = res * i;  
    }  
    return res;  
}
```

**Recursive algorithm is closer to factorial definition**

# Example – Find

- To **find** an element in an array
  - Base case
    - If array is empty, return false
  - Recursive step
    - If 1<sup>st</sup> element of array is given value, return true
    - Skip 1<sup>st</sup> element and **recur** on remainder of array



# Example – Count

- To **count** # of elements in an array
  - Base case
    - If array is empty, return **0**
  - Recursive step
    - Skip 1<sup>st</sup> element and **recur** on remainder of array
    - Add **1** to result

# Auxiliary/Helper Functions

- Some recursive problems require an auxiliary function
- Auxiliary function – the one that actually is recursive
- Example: `ArrayExamples.java`

# Recursion vs. Iteration

## ■ Iterative algorithms

### ■ May be more efficient

- No additional function calls

- Run faster, use less memory

# Recursion vs. Iteration

## ■ Recursive algorithms

### ■ Higher overhead

- Time to perform function call
- Memory for call stack

### ■ May be simpler algorithm

- Easier to understand, debug, maintain

### ■ Natural for backtracking searches

### ■ Suited for recursive data structures

- Trees, graphs...

# Making Recursion Work

- Designing a correct recursive algorithm
- Verify
  1. Base case is
    - Recognized correctly
    - Solved correctly
  2. Recursive case
    - Solves 1 or more simpler subproblems
    - Can calculate solution from solution(s) to subproblems
- Uses principle of **proof by induction**

# Requirements

## ■ Must have

- Small version of problem solvable without recursion
- Strategy to simplify problem into 1 or more smaller subproblems
- Ability to calculate overall solution from solution(s) to subproblem(s)

# Proof By Induction

- Mathematical technique
- A theorem is true for all  $n \geq 0$  if
  1. Base case
    - Prove theorem is true for  $n = 0$ , and
  2. Inductive step
    - Assume theorem is true for  $n$   
(inductive hypothesis)
    - Prove theorem must be true for  $n+1$

# Types of Recursion

## ■ Tail recursion

- Single recursive call at end of function

- Example

```
int factorial(int n, int partialResult) {  
    if (n == 0)  
        return partialResult;  
    return factorial(n-1, n*partialResult);  
}
```

- Can easily transform to iteration (loop)



# Types of Recursion

## ■ Non-tail recursion

- Recursive call(s) not at end of function

- Example

```
int nontail( int n ) {  
    ...  
    x = nontail(n-1) ;  
    y = nontail(n-2) ;  
    z = x + y;  
    return z;  
}
```

- Can transform to iteration using explicit stack

# Possible Problems – Infinite Loop

## ■ Infinite recursion

- If recursion not applied to simpler problem

```
int bad ( int n ) {  
    if ( n == 0 ) return 1;  
    return bad(n);  
}
```

- Will infinite loop
- Eventually halt when runs out of (stack) memory
  - Stack overflow

# Possible Problems – Efficiency

- May perform excessive computation
  - If recomputing solutions for subproblems

- Example

- Fibonacci numbers

- $\text{fibonacci}(0) = 1$

- $\text{fibonacci}(1) = 1$

- $\text{fibonacci}(n) = \text{fibonacci}(n-1) + \text{fibonacci}(n-2)$

# Possible Problems – Efficiency

- **Recursive algorithm to calculate fibonacci(n)**
  - If n is 0 or 1, return 1
  - Else compute fibonacci(n-1) and fibonacci(n-2)
  - Return their sum
- **Simple algorithm  $\Rightarrow$  exponential time  $O(2^n)$** 
  - Computes fibonacci(1)  $2^n$  times
- **Can solve efficiently using**
  - Iteration
  - Dynamic programming
  - Will examine different algorithm strategies later...

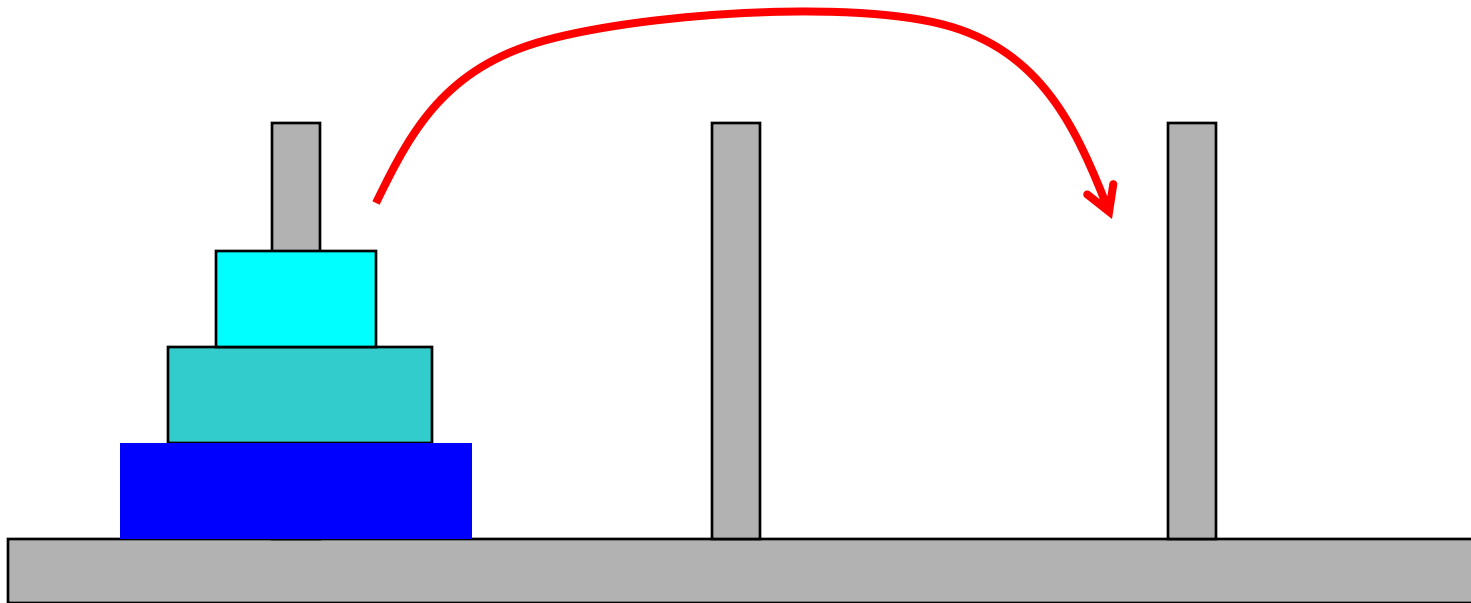
# Examples of Recursive Algorithms

- **Towers of Hanoi**
- **Binary search**
- **Quicksort**
- **N-queens**
- **Fractals**

# Example – Towers of Hanoi

## ■ Problem

- Move stack of disks between pegs
- Can only move top disk in stack
- Only allowed to place disk on top of larger disk



# Example – Towers of Hanoi

- To move a stack of  $n$  disks from peg X to Y
  - Base case
    - If  $n = 1$ , move disk from X to Y
  - Recursive step
    1. Move top  $n-1$  disks from X to 3<sup>rd</sup> peg
    2. Move bottom disk from X to Y
    3. Move top  $n-1$  disks from 3<sup>rd</sup> peg to Y

Iterative algorithm would take much longer to describe!

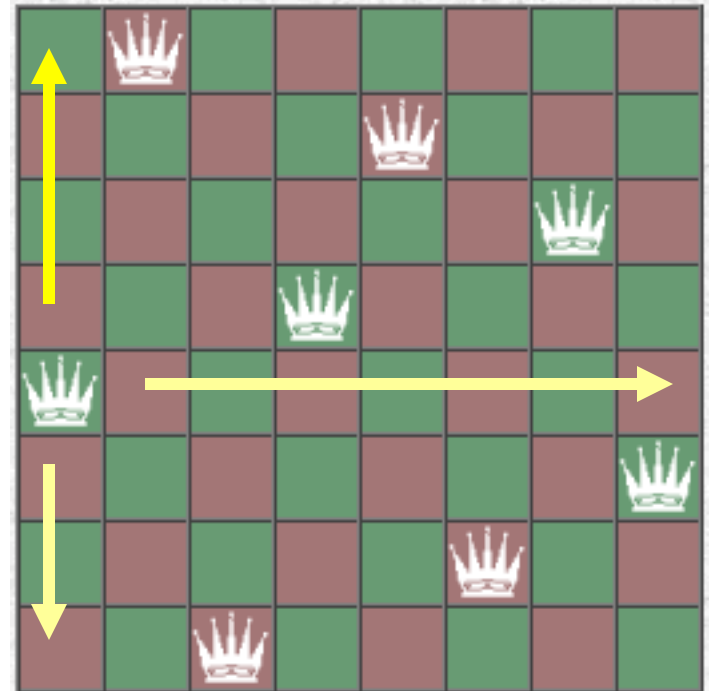
# N-Queens

## ■ Goal

- Place queens on a board such that every row and column contains one queen, but no queen can attack another queen

## ■ Recursive approach

- To place queens on  $N \times N$  board
- Assume you've already placed  $K$  queens





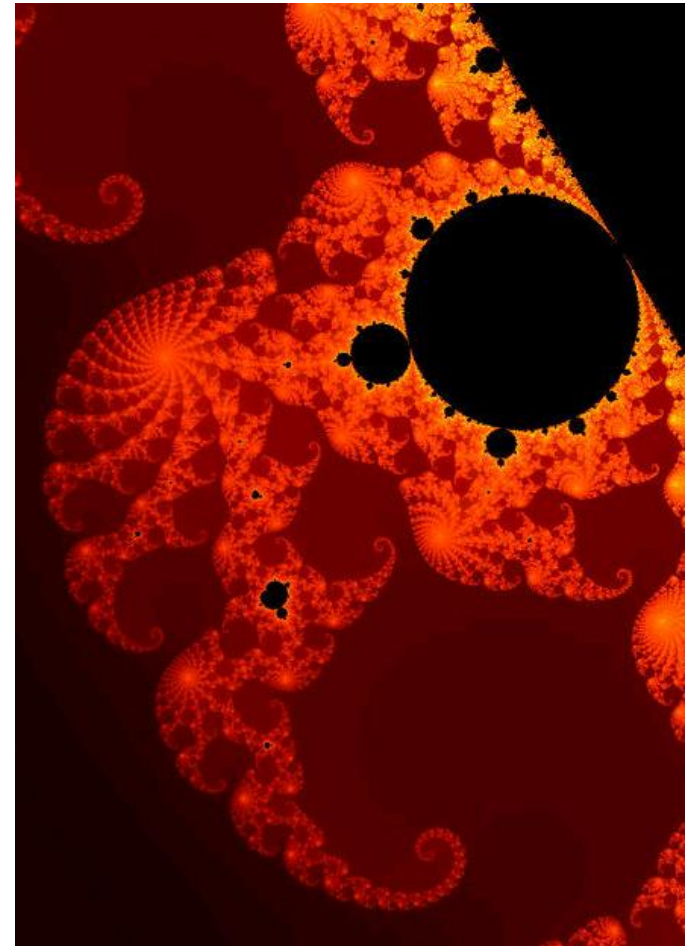
# Fractals

## ■ Goal

- Construct shapes using a simple recursive definition with a natural appearance

## ■ Properties

- Appears similar at all scales of magnification
  - Therefore “infinitely complex”
- Not easily described in Euclidean geometry



Mandelbrot Set