Finding Strongly Connected Components

Yufei Tao

Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Chinese University of Hong Kong
Let $G = (V, E)$ be a directed simple graph.

A **strongly connected component** (SCC) of $G$ is a subset $S$ of $V$ s.t.

- for any two vertices $u, v \in S$, $G$ has a path from $u$ to $v$ and a path from $v$ to $u$;
- $S$ is maximal in the sense that we cannot put any more vertex into $S$ without breaking the above property.
Example

\[ \{a, b, c\} \text{ is an SCC}. \]
\[ \{a, b, c, d\} \text{ is not an SCC}. \]
\[ \{d, e, f, k, l\} \text{ is not an SCC (because we can still add vertex } g). \]
\[ \{e, d, f, k, l, g\} \text{ is an SCC}. \]
Lemma 1: Suppose that $S_1$ and $S_2$ are both SCCs of $G$. Then, $S_1 \cap S_2 = \emptyset$.

The proof is easy and left to you.
Given a directed graph $G = (V, E)$, the goal of the **strongly connected components problem** is to divide $V$ into disjoint subsets, each being an SCC.

**Example:**

We should output: $\{a, b, c\}$, $\{d, e, f, g, k, l\}$, $\{h, i\}$, and $\{j\}$. 
Algorithm

**Step 1:** Run DFS on $G$, and list the vertices by the order they turn black (i.e., popped from the stack).

If vertex $u \in V$ is the $i$-th turning black, we **label** $u$ with $i$. 

---

Yufei Tao

Finding Strongly Connected Components
Start DFS from $e$, re-start from $h$, and then another re-start from $j$. The following is a possible turn-black order: $c, b, a, d, g, l, k, f, e, i, h, j$.

- Note: the order is not unique.

The label of $c$ is 1.
The label of $g$ is 5.
The label of $i$ is 10.
The label of $j$ is 12.
**Algorithm**

**Step 2:** Obtain the reverse graph $G^{\text{rev}}$ by reversing the directions of all the edges in $G$.

**Example:**

- **Input graph**
- **Reverse graph**
Algorithm

Step 3: Perform DFS on $G^{rev}$ by obeying the following rules:

- **Rule 1:** Start at the vertex with the largest label.
- **Rule 2:** When a restart is needed, do so from the white vertex with the largest label.

Output the set of vertices in each DFS-tree as an SCC.
Example

Vertices in ascending order of label: $c, b, a, d, g, l, k, f, e, i, h, j$.

Reverse graph $G^{rev}$:

Start DFS from $j$, which finishes immediately and discovers only $j$.

• First SCC: $\{j\}$

Restart from $h$, which finishes after discovering $h$ and $g$

• Second SCC: $\{g, h\}$

Restart from $e$, which finishes after discovering $e, d, g, f, l, and k$

• Third SCC: $\{e, d, g, f, l, k\}$

Restart from $a$, which finishes after discovering $a, b, and c$.

• Fourth SCC: $\{a, b, c\}$
Analysis

**Theorem:** Our SCC algorithm finishes in $O(|V| + |E|)$ time.

The proof is left as a regular exercise.

Next, we will prove that the algorithm correctly returns all the SCCs.
Suppose that the input graph $G$ has SCCs $S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_t$ for some $t \geq 1$.

The **SCC graph** $G^{scc}$ is defined as follows:

- Each vertex in $G^{scc}$ is a distinct SCC in $G$.
- For every two distinct vertices (a.k.a. SCCs) $S_i$ and $S_j$ ($1 \leq i, j \leq t$), $G^{scc}$ has an edge from $S_i$ to $S_j$ if some vertex in $S_i$ can reach a vertex in $S_j$ in $G$. 
Example

SCC Graph

S4
S3
S2
S1

a
b
c
d
e
f
g
h
i
j

SCC Graph

S4 ← S3 ← S2

S1
For each SCC $S_i$ ($i \in [1, t]$), define

$$\text{label}(S_i) = \max_{v \in S_i} \text{label of } v$$

Vertices in ascending order of label: $c, b, a, d, g, l, k, f, e, i, h, j$.

$\text{label}(S_1) = 12$, $\text{label}(S_2) = 11$, $\text{label}(S_3) = 9$, $\text{label}(S_4) = 3$
Lemma 2: If SCC $S_i$ (for some $i \in [1, t]$) has an edge to SCC $S_j$ (for some $j \in [1, t]$) in $G^{scc}$, then $\text{label}(S_i) > \text{label}(S_j)$.

Proof: Let $u$ be the first vertex in $S_i \cup S_j$ that turns gray in DFS (i.e., $u$ is the first vertex in $S_i \cup S_j$ discovered by DFS).

- If $u \in S_i$, $u$ has a white path to every vertex in $S_i \cup S_j$. By the white path theorem, $u$ turns black after all the vertices in $S_j$ and is the last vertex in $S_i$ turning black. This implies $\text{label}(S_i) > \text{label}(S_j)$.

- If $u \in S_j$, $u$ has a white path to every vertex in $S_j$ but no white path to any vertex in $S_i$. By the white path theorem, $u$ turns black after all the vertices in $S_j$ and before every vertex in $S_i$. This again implies $\text{label}(S_i) > \text{label}(S_j)$.
Henceforth, we arrange $S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_t$ such that

$$\text{label}(S_1) > \text{label}(S_2) > \ldots > \text{label}(S_t).$$

**Lemma 3:** Fix any $i \in [1, t]$. Consider any vertex $u \in S_i$. In $G^{\text{rev}}$ (i.e., the reverse graph), if $(v, u)$ is an incoming edge of $u$ and yet $v \notin S_i$, then $v$ belongs to some $S_j$ with $j > i$.

**Proof:** As $(v, u)$ is in $G^{\text{rev}}$, $G$ has an edge from $u$ to $v$. Hence, $S_i$ has an edge to $S_j$ in $G^{\text{scc}}$.

By Lemma 2, $\text{label}(S_i) > \text{label}(S_j)$, which means $j > i$. □
Correctness

Lemma 4: Consider the DFS on $G^{rev}$ (in Step 3 of our algorithm). For each $i \in [1, t]$, $S_i$ is exactly the set of vertices in the $i$-th DFS-tree produced.

Proof: We will prove the claim by induction on $i$.

Consider $i = 1$. Let $u$ be the vertex in $S_1$ having the largest label; $u$ is the root of the first DFS-tree. Consider the beginning moment of the first DFS on $G^{rev}$.

- As $S_1$ is an SCC, $u$ has a white path to every other vertex in $S_1$.
- By Lemma 3, $u$ has no white path to any vertex outside $S_1$.

By the white path theorem, all and only the vertices in $S_1$ are descendants of $u$ in the first DFS tree. The claim thus holds for $i = 1$. 
Correctness

Proof (cont.): Assuming that the claim holds for $i = k - 1$ (where $k \geq 2$), next we prove its correctness for $i = k$. Let $u$ be the vertex in $S_k$ having the largest label; $u$ is the root of the $k$-th DFS-tree. Consider the beginning moment of the $k$-th DFS on $G^{rev}$.

- All the vertices in $S_1, S_2, \ldots, S_{k-1}$ are black.
- As $S_k$ is an SCC, $u$ has a white path to every other vertex in $S_k$.
- By Lemma 3, $u$ has no white path to any vertex in $S_{k+1}, S_{k+2}, \ldots, S_t$.

By the white path theorem, all and only the vertices in $S_k$ are descendants of $u$ in the $k$-th DFS tree. The claim thus holds for $i = k$. □