



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH

## Text Technologies for Data Science

INFR11145

# Indexing (2)

Instructor:  
**Walid Magdy**

01-Oct-2025

1

## Lecture Objectives

- Learn more about indexing:
  - Structured documents
  - Extent index
  - Index compression
- Data structure
- Wild-card search and applications

*\* You are not asked to implement any of the content in this lecture, but you might think of using some for your course project ☺*

Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH

2

## Structured Documents

- Document are not always flat:
  - Meta-data: title, author, time-stamp
  - Structure: headline, section, body
  - Tags: link, hashtag, mention
- How to deal with it?
  - Neglect!
  - Create separate index for each field
  - Use “extent index”

Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



3

## Extent Index

- Special “term” for each element/field/tag
  - Index all terms in a structured document as plain text
  - Terms in a given field/tag get special additional entry
  - Posting: spans of window related to a given field
  - Allows multiple overlapping spans of different types

<b>he</b>	→	1,1	1,5	2,1	3,3	4,3	5,1	
<b>drink</b>	→	1,8	2,4	2,6	2,8	3,6	4,5	5,6
<b>ink</b>	→	3,8	4,2	5,8				
<b>pink</b>	→	4,8	5,7					
<b>Link</b>	→	3,1:2	4,1:4	5,7:8				

**D1:** He likes

**D2:** He likes

**D3:** The thin

**D1:** He likes to wink, he likes to drink

**D2:** He likes to drink, and drink, and drink

**D3:** [The thing](#) he likes to drink is ink

**D4:** [The ink he likes](#) to drink is pink

**D5:** He likes to wink, and drink [pink ink](#)

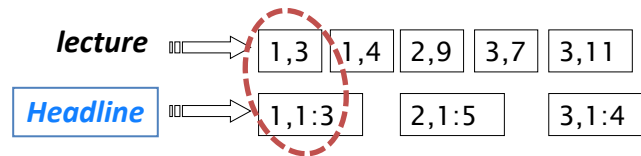
Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



4

## Using Extent

- Doc: 1 → <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>  
 Headline: “*Information retrieval lecture*”  
 Text: “~~this is~~ <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> ~~lecture 6 of the~~ <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> ~~TTDS course on~~ <sup>8</sup> ~~IR~~”
- Query → Headline: lecture

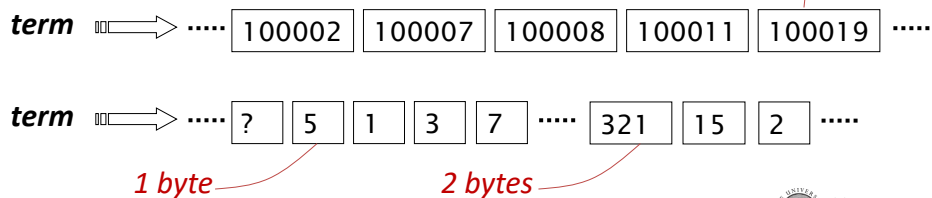


## Index Compression

- Inverted indices are big
  - Large disk space → large I/O operations
- Index compression
  - Reduce space → less I/O
  - Allow more chunks of index to be cached in memory
- Large size goes to:
  - terms? document numbers?
  - Ideas:
    - Compress document numbers, how?

## Delta Encoding

- Large collections → large sequence of doc IDs
  - e.g. Doc IDs: 1, 2, 3, ... 66,032, ....., 5,323,424,235
- Large ID number → more bytes to store
  - 1 byte: 0 → 255
  - 2 bytes: 0 → 65,535
  - 4 bytes: 0 → 4.3 B
- Idea: delta in ID instead of full ID
  - Very useful, especially for frequent terms



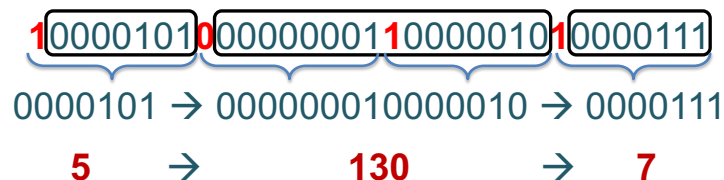
Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



7

## v-byte Encoding

- Have different byte storage for each delta in index
  - Use fewer bits to encode
  - High bit in a byte → 1/0 = terminate/continue
  - Remaining 7 bits → binary number
  - Examples:
    - "6" → 10000110
    - "127" → 11111111
    - "128" → 1000000010000000
- Real example sequence:



Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



8

## Index Compression

- There are more sophisticated compression algorithms:
  - Elias gamma code
- The more compression
  - Less storage
  - More processing
- In general
  - Less I/O + more processing > more I/O + no processing  
“>” = faster
  - With new data structures, problem is less severe

## Dictionary Data Structures

- The dictionary data structure stores the term vocabulary, document frequency, pointers to each postings list ...
- For small collections, load full dictionary in memory. In real-life, cannot load all index to memory!
  - Then what to load?
  - How to reach quickly?
  - What data structure to use for inverted index?

## Hashes

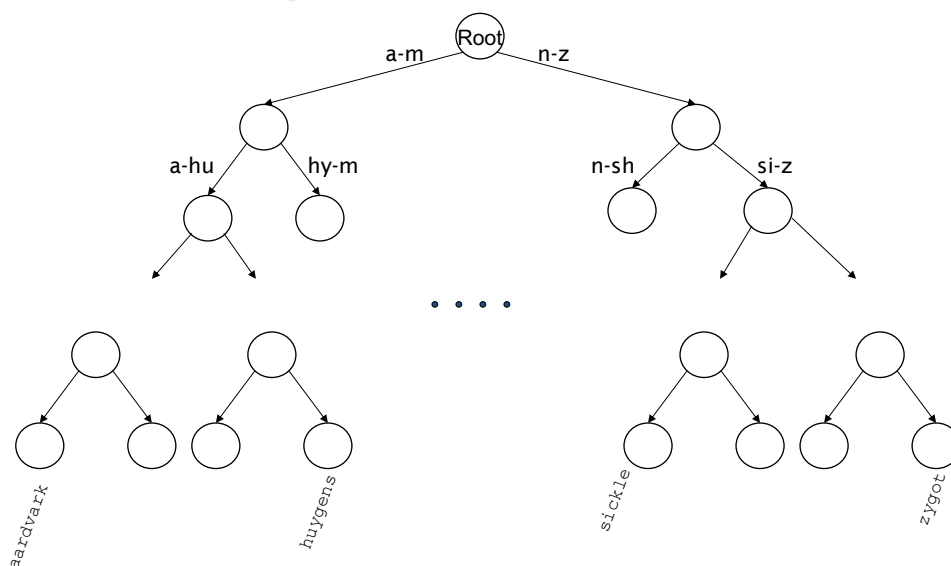
- Each vocabulary term is hashed to an integer
- Pros
  - Lookup is faster than for a tree:  $O(1)$
- Cons
  - No easy way to find minor variants:
    - judgment/judgement
  - No prefix search
  - If vocabulary keeps growing, need to occasionally do the expensive operation of rehashing everything

Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



11

## Trees: Binary Search Tree

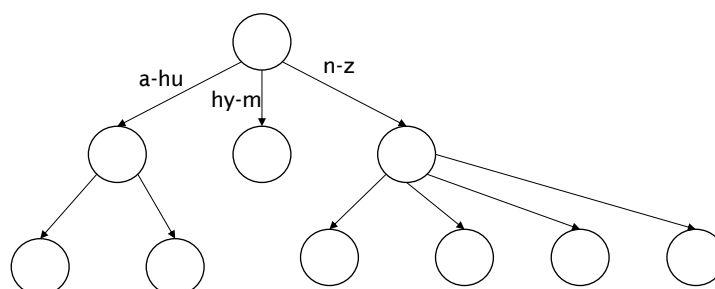


Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



12

## Trees: B-tree



Every internal node has a number of children in the interval  $[a,b]$  where  $a, b$  are appropriate natural numbers, e.g.,  $[2,4]$ .

## Trees

- Pros?
  - Solves the prefix problem (terms starting with “ab”)
- Cons?
  - Slower:  $O(\log M)$  [and this requires balanced tree]
  - Rebalancing binary trees is expensive
    - But B-trees mitigate the rebalancing problem

## Wild-Card Queries: \*

- mon\*: find all docs containing any word beginning “mon”.
- Easy with binary tree (or B-tree) lexicon
- \*mon: find words ending in “mon”: harder
  - Maintain an additional B-tree for terms backwards.
- How can we enumerate all terms meeting the wild-card query pro\*cent ?
- Query processing: se\*ate AND fil\*er ?
  - Expensive

Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



15

## Permuterm Indexes

- Transform wild-card queries so that the \* occurs at the end
- For term *hello*, index under:
  - *hello*\$, *ello*\$h, *llo*\$he, *lo*\$hel, *o*\$hell, *\$*hello  
where \$ is a special symbol.
- Rotate query wild-card to the end
- Queries:
 

• X	lookup on	X\$
• X*	lookup on	\$X*
• *X	lookup on	
• X*Y	lookup on	
- Index Size?

### Example

hello	→	hello\$	
hel*	→	hel*\$	→ \$hel*
*llo	→	*llo\$	→ llo\$*
he*lo	→	he*lo\$	→ lo\$he*

Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



16



## Character n-gram Indexes

- Enumerate all n-grams (sequence of  $n$  chars) occurring in any term
  - e.g., from text “April is the cruelest month” we get the 2-grams (bigrams) →  
 $\$a,ap,pr,ri,il,l\$, \$i,is,s\$, \$t,th,he,e\$, \$c,cr,ru,ue,el,le,es,st,t\$, \$m,mo,on,nt,h\$$
  - $\$$  is a special word boundary symbol
- Maintain a second inverted index from bigrams to dictionary terms that match each bigram.
  - Character n-grams → terms
  - terms → documents

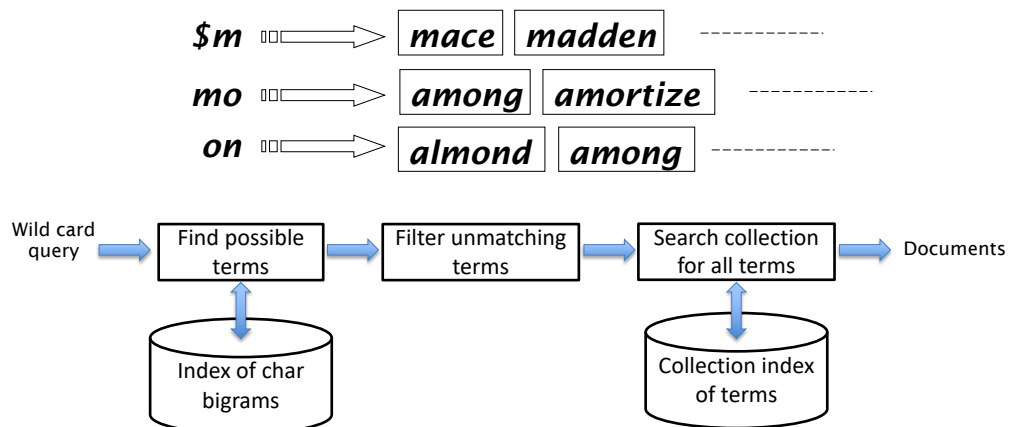
Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



17

## Character n-gram Indexes

- The  $n$ -gram index finds *terms* based on a query consisting of  $n$ -grams (here  $n=2$ ).



Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



18

## Character n-gram Indexes: Query time

- *Step 1:* Query **mon\*** → **\$m AND mo AND on**
  - It would still match **moon**.
- *Step 2:* Must post-filter these terms against query.
  - Phrase match, or post-step1 match
- *Step 3:* Surviving enumerated terms are then looked up in the term-document inverted index.  
→ **Montreal OR monster OR monkey**
- Wild-cards can result in expensive query execution (very large disjunctions...)

Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



19

## Character n-gram Indexes: Applications

- Spelling Correction
  - Create n-gram representation for words
  - Build index for words:
    - Dictionary of words → documents (each word is a document)
    - Character n-grams → terms
  - When getting a search term that is misspelled (OOV or not frequent), find possible corrections
    - Possible corrections = most matching results

Query: elepgant → **\$e el le ep pg ga an nt t\$**

Results:

elegant → **\$e el le eg ga an nt t\$**

elephant → **\$e el le ep ph ha an nt t\$**

Walid Magdy, TTDS 2025/2026



20

## Character n-gram Indexes: Applications

- Char n-grams can be used as direct index terms for some applications:
  - Arabic IR, when no stemmer/segmenter is available
  - Documents with spelling mistakes: OCR documents
- Word char representation can be with multiple n's
  - "elephant" → 2/3-gram →  
 "\$e el le ep ph ha an nt t\$ \$el \$ele lep eph pha han ant nt\$"

The **children** behaved well      الأبناء تصرفوا جيدا      \$ا ل لأ أب بن نا اء ء\$  
 Her **children** are cute      أبنائها لطاف      \$أ أب بن نا اء ءه ها ا\$

Document: Elepbant → \$e el le ep pb ba an nt t\$

Query: Elephant → \$e el le ep ph ha an nt t\$

## Summary

- Index can be multilayer
  - Extent index (multi-terms in one position in document)
- Index does not have to be formed of words
  - Character n-grams representation of words
- Two indexes are sometimes used
  - Index of character n-grams to find matching words
  - Index of terms to search for matched words

## Resources

- Text book 1: Intro to IR, Chapter 3.1 – 3.4
- Text book 2: IR in Practice, Chapter 5