Greedy Algorithms

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Objectives

- Describe the characteristics of a greedy algorithm
- Show how to use a greedy algorithm to solve several classic problems

Properties of Greedy Algorithms

1. They have *optimal substructure* — subproblems have optimal solutions that can be

combined to get the main solution.

1. They have the *Greedy Property* — We will never regret making a greedy choice locally.

Classic Example: Coin Change

- Given coins of values 25, 10, 5, 1: make 57 with as few coins as possible.
- This version can be solved greedily!
  - $57 = 25 \times 2 + 5 + 1 \times 2$.

```
1  int numCoinTypes, amount, count, i;
2  cin >> numCoinTypes;
3  vi coins;
4  for(i=0; i<numCoinTypes; ++i) {
5    cin >> x;  coins.push_back(x);
6  }
7  cin >> amount;
8  count = 0; i=0;
9  while (amount > 0)
10   if (coins[i] <= amount) {
11     amount -= coins[i]; ++count;
12   }
```

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- Optimal: 20 × 2

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- Repeat: take first activity that has start time after last finish time.

Source Code

- Assume a has pairs representing the activities.

```
1  vii a; // actvitiy pairs
2  int last;
3  cout << a[0] << endl;
4  last = a[0].second;
5  for(i=1; i<a.length; ++i)
6    if (a[i].first >= last) {
7      cout << a[i] << endl;
8      last = a[i].second;
9    }
```

In contests

- Use it if you can, but be sure. Otherwise, use Complete Search or DP.
- Learn a few classic algorithms: coin change, load balancing, interval covering
- Preprocessing input can help… e.g., sorting your input first.