

Planning and Optimization

A1. Organizational Matters

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 16, 2026

Planning and Optimization

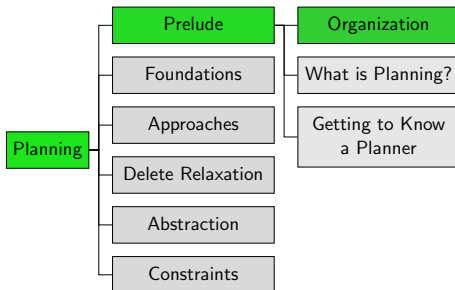
September 16, 2026 — A1. Organizational Matters

A1.1 People & Coordinates

A1.2 Target Audience & Rules

A1.3 Course Content

Content of the Course



A1.1 People & Coordinates

People: Lecturers



Malte Helmert



Gabriele Röger

Lecturers

Malte Helmert

- ▶ **email:** `malte.helmert@unibas.ch`
- ▶ **office:** room 06.004, Spiegelgasse 1

Gabriele Röger

- ▶ **email:** `gabriele.roeger@unibas.ch`
- ▶ **office:** room 04.005, Spiegelgasse 1

People: Assistant



David Speck

Assistant

David Speck

- ▶ **email:** `davidjakob.speck@unibas.ch`
- ▶ **office:** room 04.003, Spiegelgasse 5

People: Tutors



Gustavo Delazeri



Jil Panter



Florian Pommerening

Tutors

Gustavo Delazeri and Jil Panter

- ▶ **email:** `{gustavo.delazeri,j.panter}@unibas.ch`
- ▶ **office:** room 04.001, Spiegelgasse 5

Florian Pommerening

- ▶ **email:** `florian.pommerening@unibas.ch`
- ▶ **office:** room 04.005, Spiegelgasse 1

Time & Place

Lectures

- ▶ **time:** Mon 14:15–16:00, Wed 14:15–16:00
- ▶ **place:** room 00.003, Spiegelgasse 1

Exercise Sessions

- ▶ **time:** Wed 16:15–18:00
- ▶ **place:** room 00.003, Spiegelgasse 1

first exercise session: today

Communication Channels

- ▶ lecture sessions (Mon, Wed)
- ▶ exercise sessions (Wed)
- ▶ course homepage
- ▶ ADAM workspace
- ▶ Discord server (invitation link on ADAM workspace)
- ▶ email

registration:

- ▶ <https://services.unibas.ch/>
- ▶ Please register today to receive all course-related emails!

Planning and Optimization Course on the Web

Course Homepage

`https://dmi.unibas.ch/en/studium/
computer-science-informatik/lehrangebot-hs26/
lecture-planning-and-optimization/`

- ▶ course information
- ▶ slides
- ▶ link to ADAM workspace
- ▶ bonus materials (not relevant for the exam)

A1.2 Target Audience & Rules

Target Audience (Computer Science “Old”)

computer science students (regulations of spring 2026 and earlier):

- ▶ M.Sc. Computer Science
 - ▶ Major in Machine Intelligence:
module Concepts of Machine Intelligence
module Methods of Machine Intelligence
 - ▶ Major in Distributed Systems:
module Applications of Distributed Systems
- ▶ M.A. Computer Science (“Master-Studienfach”)
module Concepts of Machine Intelligence

Target Audience (Computer Science “New”)

computer science students (regulations of fall 2026 and later):

- ▶ M.Sc. Computer Science and M.A. Computer Science
 - ▶ specialization module [Machine Intelligence](#)
 - ▶ you have a lot of freedom in selecting your courses, make use of it
 - ▶ recommended for students that enjoy mathematical logic and formally rigorous approaches to computer science

Target Audience (Others)

everyone else:

- ▶ M.Sc. Data Science: module [Electives in Data Science](#)
- ▶ other students welcome

Prerequisites

prerequisites:

- ▶ general computer science background: good knowledge of
 - ▶ algorithms and data structures
 - ▶ complexity theory
 - ▶ mathematical logic
 - ▶ programming
- ▶ background in Artificial Intelligence:
 - ▶ Foundations of Artificial Intelligence course (13548)
 - ▶ in particular chapters on state-space search

Gaps?

↪ talk to us to discuss a self-study plan to catch up

Exam

- ▶ **written examination** (105 min)
- ▶ date and time: **January 27, 14:00–16:00**
- ▶ place: Biozentrum, room U1.111 (Maurice E. Müller-Saal)
- ▶ 8 ECTS credits
- ▶ admission to exam: 50% of the exercise marks
- ▶ final grade based on exam exclusively
- ▶ **no repeat exam** (except in case of illness)

Exercise Sheets

exercise sheets (homework assignments):

- ▶ solved in **groups of two or three** ($3 < 4$), submitted in ADAM
- ▶ weekly homework assignments
 - ▶ released Monday before the lecture
 - ▶ have questions or need help?
↪ assistance provided in Wednesday exercises
 - ▶ not sure if you need help?
↪ **start before Wednesday!**
 - ▶ due following Monday at 23:59
- ▶ mixture of theory, programming and experiments
- ▶ range from basic understanding to research-oriented

Programming Exercises

programming exercises:

- ▶ part of regular assignments
- ▶ solutions that obviously do not work: 0 marks
- ▶ work with existing C++ and Python code

Exercise Sessions

exercise sessions:

- ▶ ask questions about current assignments (and course)
- ▶ work on homework assignments
- ▶ discuss past homework assignments

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work, ideas, or words as your own, without proper attribution.

For example:

- ▶ Using someone's text without citation
- ▶ Paraphrasing too closely
- ▶ Using information from a source without attribution
- ▶ Passing off AI-generated content as your own original work

Long-term impact:

- ▶ You undermine your own learning.
- ▶ You start to lose confidence in your ability to think, write, and solve problems independently.
- ▶ Damage to academic reputation and professional consequences in future careers

Plagiarism in Exercises

- ▶ You may discuss material from the course, including the exercise assignments, with your peers.
- ▶ **But:** You have to independently write down your exercise solutions (in your team).
- ▶ AI support is acceptable to the same extent as it is acceptable from someone who is not a member of your team.

Consequences of clear plagiarism:

- ▶ 0 marks for the exercise sheet (first time)
- ▶ exclusion from exam (second time)

You are jointly responsible for your submission as a team.

Inconclusive Cases

If a tutor has serious doubts

- 1 The solution receives **0 marks initially**.
- 2 This is a **temporary assessment**, not a final accusation of plagiarism.
- 3 If you did not plagiarize, take it as a compliment.
Your solution was probably exceptionally good.

How to get the marks

- 1 Come to the next exercise session.
- 2 Explain your solution and reasoning to your tutor.
- 3 If you can demonstrate that you understand the solution,
the marks are awarded.

Exercises too difficult? We are happy to help!

Special Needs?

- ▶ We (and the university) strive for equality of students with disabilities or chronic illnesses.
- ▶ Contact the lecturers for small adaptations.
- ▶ Contact the Students Without Barriers (StoB) service point for general adaptations and disadvantage compensation.

A1.3 Course Content

Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives

- ▶ get to know theoretical and algorithmic foundations of classical planning and work on practical implementations
- ▶ understand fundamental concepts underlying modern planning algorithms and theoretical relationships that connect them
- ▶ become equipped to understand research papers and conduct projects in this area

Course Material

course material:

- ▶ slides (online)
- ▶ no textbook
- ▶ additional material on request

Git Repository

- ▶ We use a git repository for programming exercises and for demos during the lecture.
- ▶ Setting up the repository is your first task for the exercises.

TL;DR version:

Clone the Repository

```
# If you have SSH keys set up for GitHub:  
$ git clone \  
  git@github.com:aibasel-teaching/planopt-hs26.git  
# Otherwise:  
$ git clone \  
  https://github.com/aibasel-teaching/planopt-hs26.git
```

Demo Examples

When working with the repository, go to its base directory:

Base Directory for Demos and Exercises

```
$ cd planopt-hs26
```

One-time demo set-up (from the base directory)
if the necessary software is installed on your machine:

Demo Set-Up

```
$ cd demo/fast-downward  
$ ./build.py
```

Under Construction...



- ▶ Advanced courses are close to the frontiers of research and therefore constantly change.
- ▶ We are always happy about feedback, corrections and suggestions!

Planning and Optimization

A2. What is Planning?

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 16, 2026

Planning and Optimization

September 16, 2026 — A2. What is Planning?

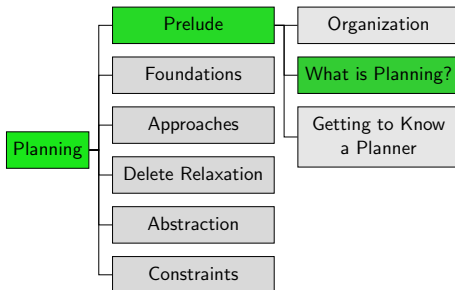
A2.1 Planning

A2.2 Planning Task Examples

A2.3 How Hard is Planning?

A2.4 Summary

Content of the Course



Before We Start...

- Prelude** (Chapters A1–A3): very high-level intro to planning
- ▶ our goal: give you a little feeling what planning is about
 - ▶ **preface** to the actual course
 - ~> main course content (beginning with Chapter B1)
will be mathematically formal and rigorous
 - ▶ You can ignore the prelude when preparing for the exam.

A2.1 Planning

General Problem Solving

Wikipedia: General Problem Solver

General Problem Solver (GPS) was a computer program created in 1959 by Herbert Simon, J.C. Shaw, and Allen Newell intended to work as a universal problem solver machine.

Any formalized symbolic problem can be solved, in principle, by GPS. [...]

GPS was the first computer program which separated its knowledge of problems (rules represented as input data) from its strategy of how to solve problems (a generic solver engine).

- ↪ these days called “domain-independent automated **planning**”
- ↪ this is what the course is about

So What is Domain-Independent Automated Planning?

Automated Planning (Pithy Definition)

“Planning is the art and practice of thinking before acting.”

— Patrik Haslum

Automated Planning (More Technical Definition)

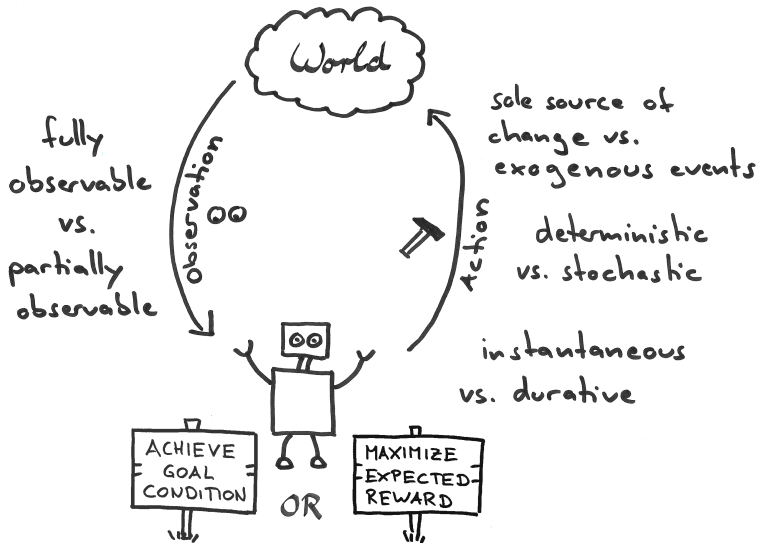
“Selecting a goal-leading course of action
based on a high-level description of the world.”

— Jörg Hoffmann

Domain-Independence of Automated Planning

Create **one** planning algorithm that performs sufficiently well
on **many** application domains (including future ones).

General Perspective on Planning



Example: Earth Observation



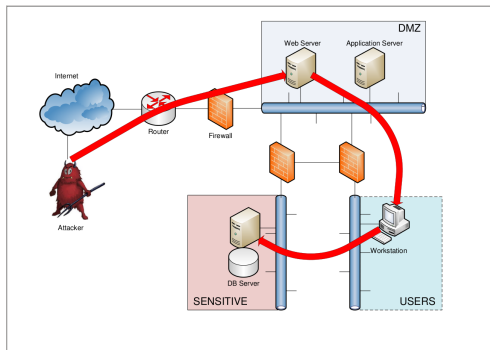
- ▶ satellite takes images of patches on Earth
- ▶ use [weather forecast](#) to optimize probability of high-quality images

Example: Termes



Harvard TERMES robots, based on termites

Example: Cybersecurity



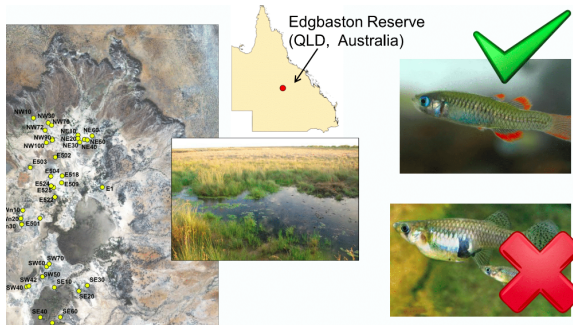
CALDERA automated adversary emulation system

Example: Intelligent Greenhouse



photo © LemnaTec GmbH

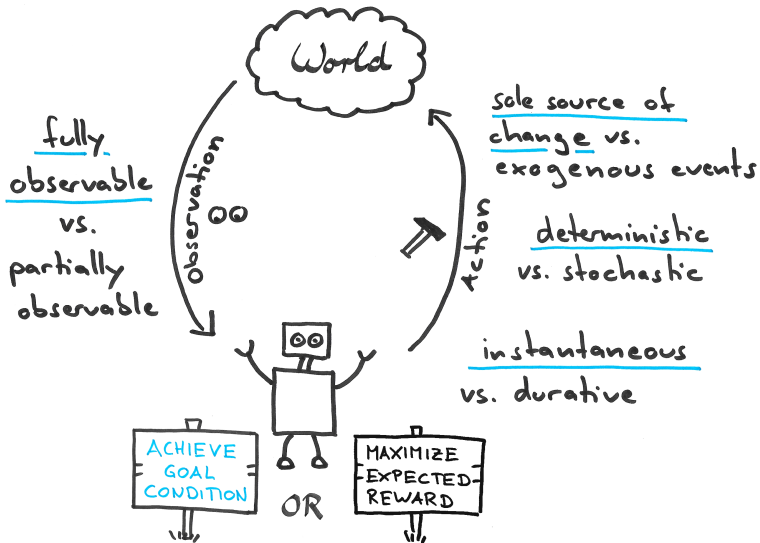
Example: Red-finned Blue-eye



Picture by Iadine Chadès

- ▶ red-finned blue-eye population threatened by *gambusia*
- ▶ springs connected probabilistically during rain season
- ▶ find strategy to *save* red-finned blue-eye from *extinction*

Classical Planning



Model-based vs. Data-driven Approaches



Model-based approaches know the “inner workings” of the world
~> reasoning



Data-driven approaches rely only on collected data from a black-box world
~> learning

We focus on model-based approaches.

Planning Tasks

input to a planning algorithm: **planning task**

- ▶ initial state of the world
- ▶ actions that change the state
- ▶ goal to be achieved

output of a planning algorithm:

- ▶ **plan**: sequence of actions taking initial state to a goal state
- ▶ or confirmation that no plan exists

↪ formal definitions later in the course

The Planning Research Landscape

- ▶ one of the major subfields of Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- ▶ represented at major AI conferences (IJCAI, AAAI, ECAI)
- ▶ annual specialized conference ICAPS ($\approx$ 250 participants)
- ▶ major journals: general AI journals (AIJ, JAIR)

Classical Planning

This course covers **classical planning**:

- ▶ offline (static)
- ▶ discrete
- ▶ deterministic
- ▶ fully observable
- ▶ single-agent
- ▶ sequential (plans are action sequences)
- ▶ domain-independent

This is just **one facet** of planning.

Many others are studied in AI. Algorithmic ideas often (but not always) translate well to more general problems.

More General Planning Topics

More general kinds of planning include:

- ▶ ~~offline~~: online planning; planning and execution
- ▶ ~~discrete~~: continuous planning (e.g., real-time/hybrid systems)
- ▶ ~~deterministic~~: FOND planning; probabilistic planning
- ▶ ~~single-agent~~: multi-agent planning; general game playing; game-theoretic planning
- ▶ ~~fully observable~~: POND planning; conformant planning
- ▶ ~~sequential~~: e.g., temporal planning

Domain-dependent planning problems in AI include:

- ▶ pathfinding, including grid-based and multi-agent (MAPF)
- ▶ continuous motion planning

A2.2 Planning Task Examples

Example: The Seven Bridges of Königsberg

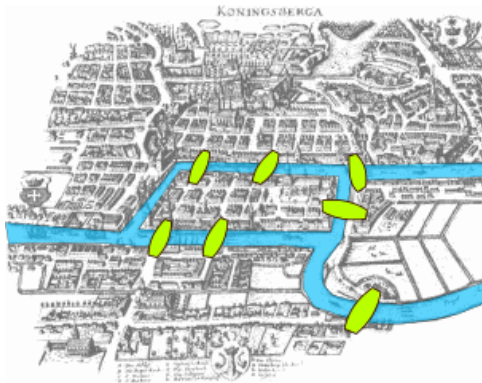


image credits: Bogdan Giuscă (public domain)

Demo

\$ ls demo/koenigsberg

Example: Intelligent Greenhouse



photo © LemnaTec GmbH

Demo

```
$ ls demo/ipc/scanalyzer-08-strips
```

Example: FreeCell

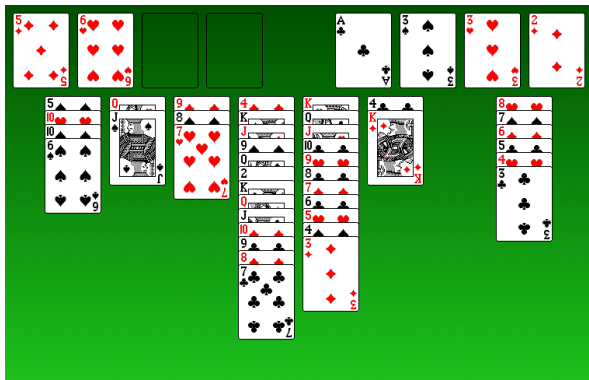


image credits: GNOME Project (GNU General Public License)

Demo Material

```
$ ls demo/ipc/freecell
```

Many More Examples

Demo

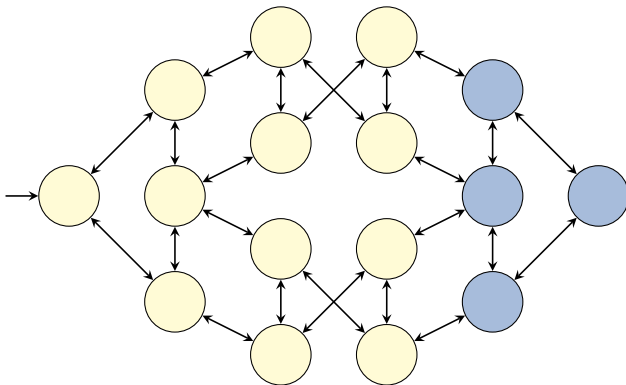
```
$ ls demo/ipc
agricola-opt18-strips
agricola-sat18-strips
airport
airport-adl
assembly
barman-mco14-strips
barman-opt11-strips
barman-opt14-strips
...
```

↪ (most) benchmarks of planning competitions IPC since 1998

A2.3 How Hard is Planning?

Classical Planning as State-Space Search

classical planning as **state-space search**:



~> much more on this later in the course

Is Planning Difficult?

Classical planning is computationally challenging:

- ▶ number of states grows **exponentially** with description size when using (propositional) logic-based representations
- ▶ **provably hard** (PSPACE-complete)

↪ we prove this later in the course

problem sizes:

- ▶ Seven Bridges of Königsberg: **64** reachable states
- ▶ Rubik's Cube: **$4.325 \cdot 10^{19}$** reachable states
↪ consider 2 billion/second ↪ 1 billion years
- ▶ standard benchmarks: some with **$> 10^{200}$** reachable states

A2.4 Summary

Summary

- ▶ **planning** = thinking before acting
- ▶ major subarea of Artificial Intelligence
- ▶ **domain-independent** planning = general problem solving
- ▶ **classical planning** = the “easy case”
(deterministic, fully observable etc.)
- ▶ still hard enough!
 $\rightsquigarrow$ PSPACE-complete because of huge number of states
- ▶ often solved by **state-space search**
- ▶ number of states grows **exponentially** with input size

Planning and Optimization

A3. Getting to Know a Planner

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 21, 2026

Planning and Optimization

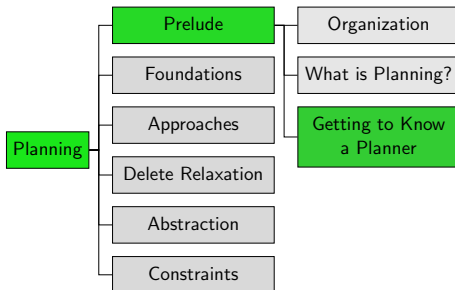
September 21, 2026 — A3. Getting to Know a Planner

A3.1 Fast Downward and VAL

A3.2 15-Puzzle

A3.3 Summary

Content of the Course



A3.1 Fast Downward and VAL

Getting to Know a Planner

We now play around a bit with a planner and its input:

- ▶ look at **problem formulation**
- ▶ run a **planner** (= planning system/planning algorithm)
- ▶ **validate** plans found by the planner

Planner: Fast Downward

Fast Downward

We use the **Fast Downward** planner in this course

- ▶ because we know it well (developed by our research group)
- ▶ because it implements many search algorithms and heuristics
- ▶ because it is the classical planner most commonly used as a basis for other planners

↪ <https://www.fast-downward.org>

Validator: VAL

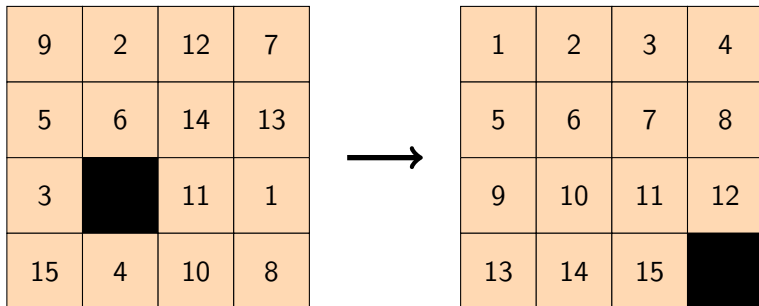
VAL

We use the **VAL** plan validation tool (Fox, Howey & Long) to independently verify that the plans we generate are correct.

- ▶ very useful debugging tool
- ▶ <https://github.com/KCL-Planning/VAL>

A3.2 15-Puzzle

Illustrating Example: 15-Puzzle



Solving the 15-Puzzle

Demo

```
$ cd demo
$ less tile/puzzle.pddl
$ less tile/puzzle01.pddl
$ ./fast-downward.py \
    tile/puzzle.pddl tile/puzzle01.pddl \
    --evaluator "h=ff()" \
    --search "eager_greedy([h],preferred=[h])"
...
$ validate tile/puzzle.pddl tile/puzzle01.pddl \
    sas_plan
...
```

Variation: Weighted 15-Puzzle

Weighted 15-Puzzle:

- ▶ moving different tiles has different cost
- ▶ cost of moving tile x = number of prime factors of x

Demo

```
$ cd demo
$ meld tile/puzzle.pddl tile/weight.pddl
$ meld tile/puzzle01.pddl tile/weight01.pddl
$ ./fast-downward.py \
    tile/weight.pddl tile/weight01.pddl \
    --evaluator "h=ff()" \
    --search "eager_greedy([h],preferred=[h])"
...
```

Variation: Glued 15-Puzzle

Glued 15-Puzzle:

- ▶ some tiles are glued in place and cannot be moved

Demo

```
$ cd demo
$ meld tile/puzzle.pddl tile/glued.pddl
$ meld tile/puzzle01.pddl tile/glued01.pddl
$ ./fast-downward.py \
    tile/glued.pddl tile/glued01.pddl \
    --evaluator "h=cg()" \
    --search "eager_greedy([h],preferred=[h])"
...
```

Note: different heuristic used!

Variation: Cheating 15-Puzzle

Cheating 15-Puzzle:

- ▶ Can remove tiles from puzzle frame (creating more blanks) and reinsert tiles at any blank location.

Demo

```
$ cd demo
$ meld tile/puzzle.pddl tile/cheat.pddl
$ meld tile/puzzle01.pddl tile/cheat01.pddl
$ ./fast-downward.py \
    tile/cheat.pddl tile/cheat01.pddl \
    --evaluator "h=ff()" \
    --search "eager_greedy([h],preferred=[h])"
...
```

A3.3 Summary

Summary

- ▶ We saw planning tasks modeled in the PDDL language.
- ▶ We ran the Fast Downward planner and VAL plan validator.
- ▶ We made some modifications to PDDL problem formulations and checked the impact on the planner.

Planning and Optimization

B1. Transition Systems and Propositional Logic

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 21, 2026

Planning and Optimization

September 21, 2026 — B1. Transition Systems and Propositional Logic

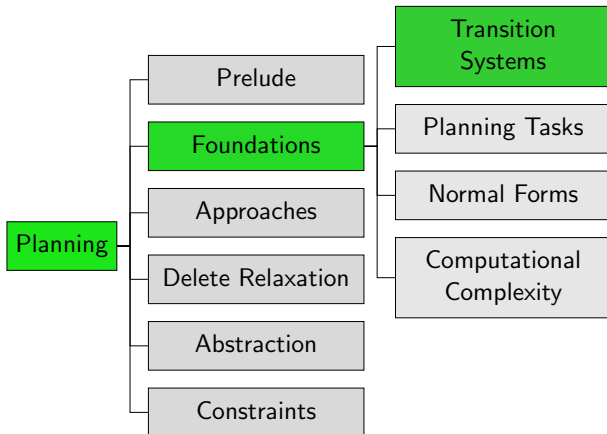
B1.1 Transition Systems

B1.2 Example: Blocks World

B1.3 Reminder: Propositional Logic

B1.4 Summary

Content of the Course



Next Steps

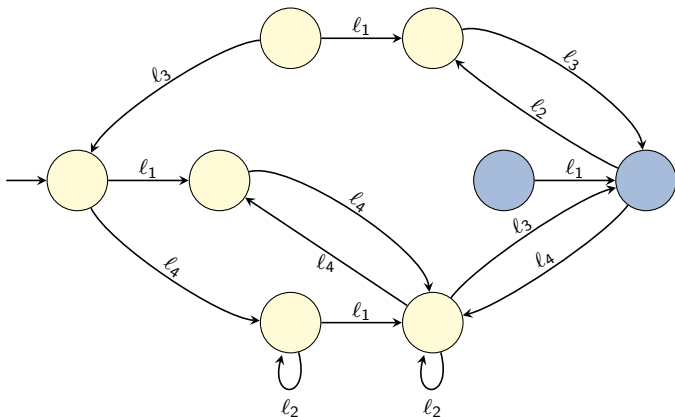
Our next steps are to formally define our problem:

- ▶ introduce a mathematical model for planning tasks:
transition systems
↪ Chapter B1
- ▶ introduce **compact representations** for planning tasks
suitable as input for planning algorithms
↪ Chapter B2

B1.1 Transition Systems

Transition System Example

Transition systems are often depicted as **directed arc-labeled graphs** with decorations to indicate the initial state and goal states.



$$c(\ell_1) = 1, \quad c(\ell_2) = 1, \quad c(\ell_3) = 5, \quad c(\ell_4) = 0$$

Transition Systems

Definition (Transition System)

A **transition system** is a 6-tuple $\mathcal{T} = \langle S, L, c, T, s_0, S_\star \rangle$ where

- ▶ S is a finite set of **states**,
- ▶ L is a finite set of (transition) **labels**,
- ▶ $c : L \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_0^+$ is a **label cost** function,
- ▶ $T \subseteq S \times L \times S$ is the **transition relation**,
- ▶ $s_0 \in S$ is the **initial state**, and
- ▶ $S_\star \subseteq S$ is the set of **goal states**.

We say that $\mathcal{T}$ **has the transition** $\langle s, \ell, s' \rangle$ if $\langle s, \ell, s' \rangle \in T$.

We also write this as $s \xrightarrow{\ell} s'$, or $s \rightarrow s'$ when not interested in ℓ .

Note: Transition systems are also called **state spaces**.

Deterministic Transition Systems

Definition (Deterministic Transition System)

A transition system is called **deterministic** if for all states s and all labels ℓ , there is **at most one** state s' with $s \xrightarrow{\ell} s'$.

Example: previously shown transition system

Transition System Terminology (1)

We use common terminology from graph theory:

- ▶ s' **successor** of s if $s \rightarrow s'$
- ▶ s **predecessor** of s' if $s \rightarrow s'$

Transition System Terminology (2)

We use common terminology from graph theory:

- ▶ s' **reachable** from s if there exists a sequence of transitions $s^0 \xrightarrow{\ell_1} s^1, \dots, s^{n-1} \xrightarrow{\ell_n} s^n$ s.t. $s^0 = s$ and $s^n = s'$
 - ▶ **Note:** $n = 0$ possible; then $s = s'$
 - ▶ $s^0, \dots, s^n$ is called **(state) path** from s to s'
 - ▶ $\ell_1, \dots, \ell_n$ is called **(label) path** from s to s'
 - ▶ $s^0 \xrightarrow{\ell_1} s^1, \dots, s^{n-1} \xrightarrow{\ell_n} s^n$ is called **trace** from s to s'
 - ▶ **length** of path/trace is n
 - ▶ **cost** of label path/trace is $\sum_{i=1}^n c(\ell_i)$

Transition System Terminology (3)

We use common terminology from graph theory:

- ▶ s' **reachable** (without reference state) means reachable from initial state s_0
- ▶ **solution** or **goal path** from s : path from s to some $s' \in S_*$
 - ▶ if s is omitted, $s = s_0$ is implied
- ▶ transition system **solvable** if a goal path from s_0 exists

B1.2 Example: Blocks World

Running Example: Blocks World

- ▶ Throughout the course, we occasionally use the **blocks world** domain as an example.
- ▶ In the blocks world, a number of different blocks are arranged on a table.
- ▶ Our job is to rearrange them according to a given goal.

Blocks World Rules (1)

Location on the table does not matter.

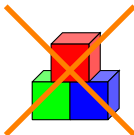


Location on a block does not matter.

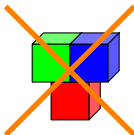


Blocks World Rules (2)

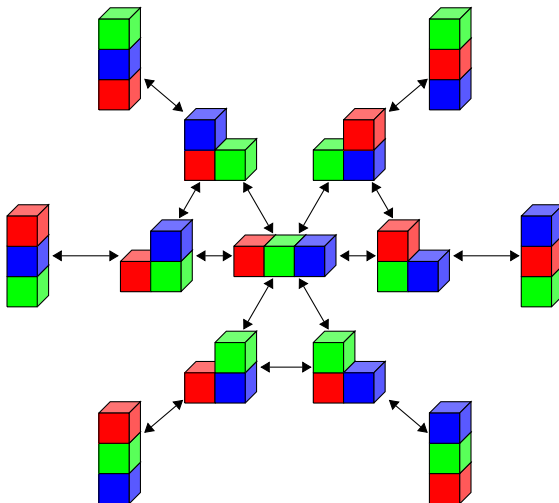
At most one block may be below a block.



At most one block may be on top of a block.



Blocks World Transition System for Three Blocks



Labels omitted for clarity. All label costs are 1. Initial/goal states not marked.

Blocks World Computational Properties

blocks	states	blocks	states
1	1	10	58941091
2	3	11	824073141
3	13	12	12470162233
4	73	13	202976401213
5	501	14	3535017524403
6	4051	15	65573803186921
7	37633	16	1290434218669921
8	394353	17	26846616451246353
9	4596553	18	588633468315403843

- Finding solutions is possible in linear time in the number of blocks: move everything onto the table, then construct the goal configuration.
- Finding a shortest solution is NP-complete given a compact description of the problem.

The Need for Compact Descriptions

- ▶ We see from the blocks world example that transition systems are often **far too large** to be directly used as **inputs** to planning algorithms.
- ▶ We therefore need **compact descriptions** of transition systems.
- ▶ For this purpose, we will use **propositional logic**, which allows expressing information about 2^n states as logical formulas over n **state variables**.

B1.3 Reminder: Propositional Logic

More on Propositional Logic

Need to Catch Up?

- ▶ This section is a **reminder**. We assume you are already well familiar with propositional logic.
- ▶ If this is not the case, we recommend Chapters D1–D4 of the **Discrete Structures** (formerly **Discrete Mathematics in Computer Science**) course:
`https://dmi.unibas.ch/en/studies/computer-science/course-offer-fall-semester-25/lecture-discrete-mathematics-in-computer-science/`
 - ▶ Videos for these chapters are available on request.

Syntax of Propositional Logic

Definition (Logical Formula)

Let A be a set of **atomic propositions**.

The **logical formulas** over A are constructed by finite application of the following rules:

- ▶ $\top$ and $\perp$ are logical formulas (**truth** and **falsity**).
- ▶ For all $a \in A$, a is a logical formula (**atom**).
- ▶ If φ is a logical formula, then so is $\neg\varphi$ (**negation**).
- ▶ If φ and ψ are logical formulas, then so are $(\varphi \vee \psi)$ (**disjunction**) and $(\varphi \wedge \psi)$ (**conjunction**).

Syntactical Conventions for Propositional Logic

Abbreviations:

- ▶ $(\varphi \rightarrow \psi)$ is short for $(\neg\varphi \vee \psi)$ (**implication**)
- ▶ $(\varphi \leftrightarrow \psi)$ is short for $((\varphi \rightarrow \psi) \wedge (\psi \rightarrow \varphi))$ (**equijunction**)
- ▶ parentheses omitted when not necessary:
 - ▶ $(\neg)$ binds more tightly than binary connectives
 - ▶ $(\wedge)$ binds more tightly than $(\vee)$,
which binds more tightly than $(\rightarrow)$,
which binds more tightly than $(\leftrightarrow)$

Semantics of Propositional Logic

Definition (Interpretation, Model)

An **interpretation** of propositions A is a function $I : A \rightarrow \{\mathbf{T}, \mathbf{F}\}$.

Define the notation $I \models \varphi$ (I **satisfies** φ ; I is a **model** of φ ; φ is **true** under I) for interpretations I and formulas φ by

- ▶ $I \models \top$
- ▶ $I \not\models \perp$
- ▶ $I \models a$ iff $I(a) = \mathbf{T}$ (for all $a \in A$)
- ▶ $I \models \neg\varphi$ iff $I \not\models \varphi$
- ▶ $I \models (\varphi \vee \psi)$ iff ($I \models \varphi$ or $I \models \psi$)
- ▶ $I \models (\varphi \wedge \psi)$ iff ($I \models \varphi$ and $I \models \psi$)

Note: Interpretations are also called **valuations**
or **truth assignments**.

Propositional Logic Terminology (1)

- ▶ A logical formula φ is **satisfiable** if there is at least one interpretation I such that $I \models \varphi$.
- ▶ Otherwise it is **unsatisfiable**.
- ▶ A logical formula φ is **valid** or a **tautology** if $I \models \varphi$ for all interpretations I .
- ▶ A logical formula ψ is a **logical consequence** of a logical formula φ , written $\varphi \models \psi$, if $I \models \psi$ for all interpretations I with $I \models \varphi$.
- ▶ Two logical formulas φ and ψ are **logically equivalent**, written $\varphi \equiv \psi$, if $\varphi \models \psi$ and $\psi \models \varphi$.

Question: How to phrase these in terms of **models**?

Propositional Logic Terminology (2)

- ▶ A logical formula that is a proposition a or a negated proposition $\neg a$ for some atomic proposition $a \in A$ is a **literal**.
- ▶ A formula that is a disjunction of literals is a **clause**.
This includes **unit clauses** ℓ consisting of a single literal and the **empty clause** $\perp$ consisting of zero literals.
- ▶ A formula that is a conjunction of literals is a **monomial**.
This includes **unit monomials** ℓ consisting of a single literal and the **empty monomial** $\top$ consisting of zero literals.

Normal forms:

- ▶ negation normal form (NNF)
- ▶ conjunctive normal form (CNF)
- ▶ disjunctive normal form (DNF)

B1.4 Summary

Summary

- ▶ **Transition systems** are (typically huge) directed graphs that encode how the state of the world can change.
- ▶ **Propositional logic** allows us to compactly describe complex information about large sets of interpretations as **logical formulas**.

Planning and Optimization

B2. Introduction to Planning Tasks

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 23, 2026

Planning and Optimization

September 23, 2026 — B2. Introduction to Planning Tasks

B2.1 Introduction

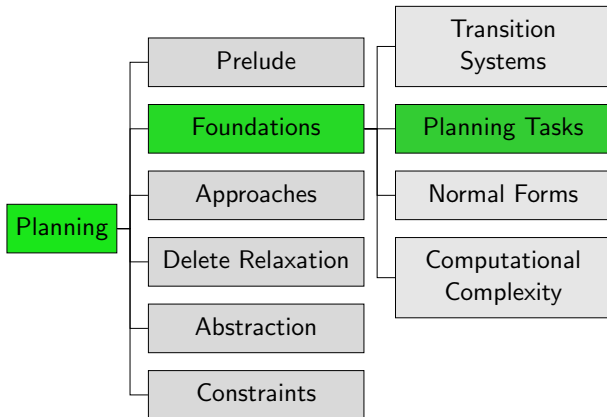
B2.2 State Variables

B2.3 State Formulas

B2.4 Operators and Effects

B2.5 Summary

Content of the Course



B2.1 Introduction

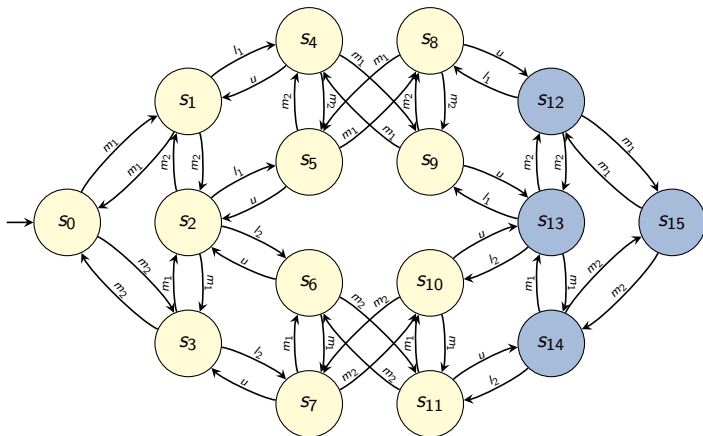
The State Explosion Problem

- ▶ We saw in blocks world:
 n blocks $\rightsquigarrow$ number of states **exponential** in n
- ▶ same is true everywhere we look
- ▶ known as the **state explosion problem**

To represent transitions systems compactly,
need to tame these exponentially growing aspects:

- ▶ states
- ▶ goal states
- ▶ transitions

Running Example: Transition System



$$c(m_1) = 5, c(m_2) = 5, c(l_1) = 1, c(l_2) = 1, c(u) = 1$$

B2.2 State Variables

Compact Descriptions of Transition Systems

How to specify huge transition systems
without enumerating the states?

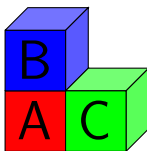
- ▶ represent different aspects of the world
in terms of different (propositional) **state variables**
- ▶ individual state variables are atomic propositions
 $\rightsquigarrow$ a state is an **interpretation of state variables**
- ▶ n state variables induce 2^n states
 $\rightsquigarrow$ **exponentially more compact** than “flat” representations

Example: n^2 variables suffice for blocks world with n blocks

Blocks World State with Propositional Variables

Example

$s(A\text{-on-}B) = \mathbf{F}$
 $s(A\text{-on-}C) = \mathbf{F}$
 $s(A\text{-on-table}) = \mathbf{T}$
 $s(B\text{-on-}A) = \mathbf{T}$
 $s(B\text{-on-}C) = \mathbf{F}$
 $s(B\text{-on-table}) = \mathbf{F}$
 $s(C\text{-on-}A) = \mathbf{F}$
 $s(C\text{-on-}B) = \mathbf{F}$
 $s(C\text{-on-table}) = \mathbf{T}$



$\rightsquigarrow$ 9 variables for 3 blocks

Propositional State Variables

Definition (Propositional State Variable)

A **propositional state variable** is a symbol X .

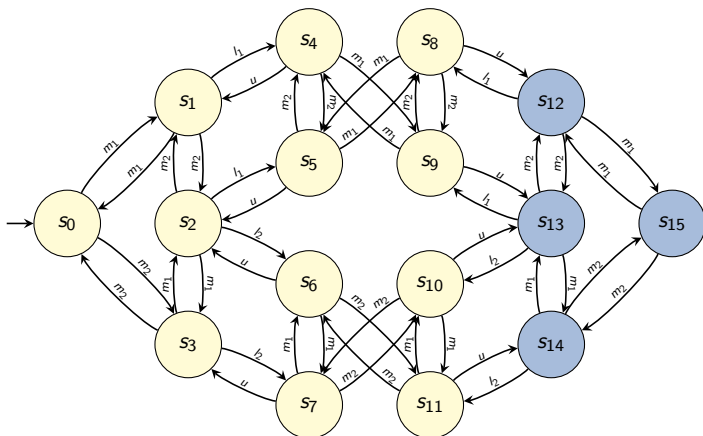
Let V be a finite set of propositional state variables.

A **state** s over V is an interpretation of V , i.e.,
a truth assignment $s : V \rightarrow \{\mathbf{T}, \mathbf{F}\}$.

Running Example: Compact State Descriptions

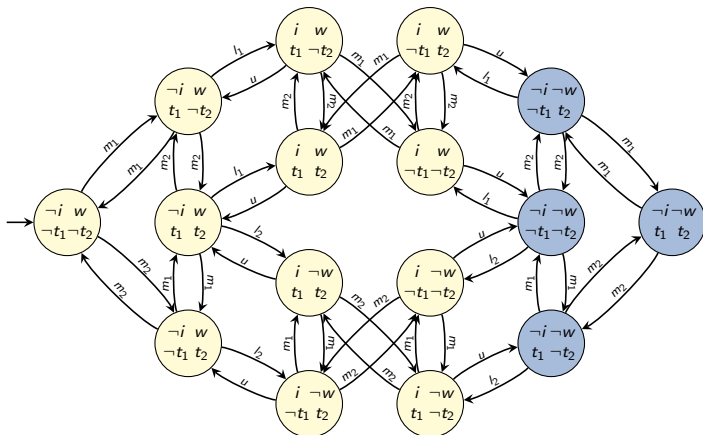
- ▶ In the running example, we describe 16 states with 4 propositional state variables ($2^4 = 16$).

Running Example: Opaque States



Running Example: Using State Variables

state variables $V = \{i, w, t_1, t_2\}$



states shown by true literals

example: $\{i \mapsto \mathbf{T}, w \mapsto \mathbf{F}, t_1 \mapsto \mathbf{T}, t_2 \mapsto \mathbf{F}\} \rightsquigarrow i \neg w \ t_1 \neg t_2$

Running Example: Intuition

Intuition: delivery task with 2 trucks, 1 package, locations L and R
transition labels:

- ▶ m_1/m_2 : move first/second truck
- ▶ l_1/l_2 : load package into first/second truck
- ▶ u : unload package from a truck

state variables:

- ▶ t_1 true if first truck is at location L (else at R)
- ▶ t_2 true if second truck is at location L (else at R)
- ▶ i true if package is inside a truck
- ▶ w encodes where exactly the package is:
 - ▶ if i is true, w true if package in first truck
 - ▶ if i is false, w true if package at location L

B2.3 State Formulas

Representing Sets of States

How do we compactly represent sets of states,
for example the set of goal states?

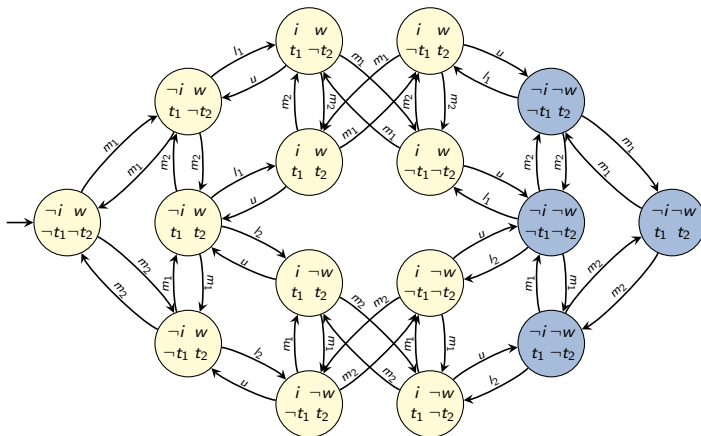
Idea: **formula** φ over the state variables represents the **models** of φ .

Definition (State Formula)

Let V be a finite set of propositional state variables.

A **formula** over V is a propositional logic formula using V as the set of atomic propositions.

Running Example: Representing Goal States



goal formula $\gamma = \neg i \wedge \neg w$ represents goal states $S_\star$

B2.4 Operators and Effects

Operators Representing Transitions

How do we compactly represent **transitions**?

- ▶ most complex aspect of a planning task
- ▶ central concept: **operators**

Idea: one operator o for each transition label ℓ , describing

- ▶ **in which states** s a transition $s \xrightarrow{\ell} s'$ exists (precondition)
- ▶ how state s' **differs** from state s (effect)
- ▶ what the cost of ℓ is

Syntax of Operators

Definition (Operator)

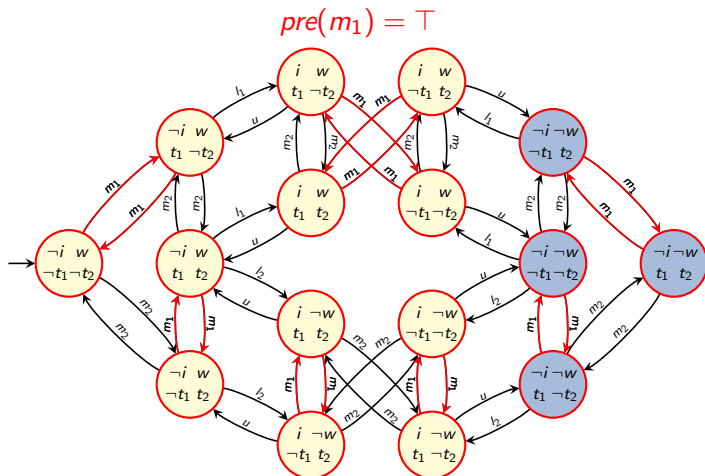
An **operator** o over state variables V is an object with three properties:

- ▶ a **precondition** $pre(o)$, a formula over V
- ▶ an **effect** $eff(o)$ over V , defined later in this chapter
- ▶ a **cost** $cost(o) \in \mathbb{R}_0^+$

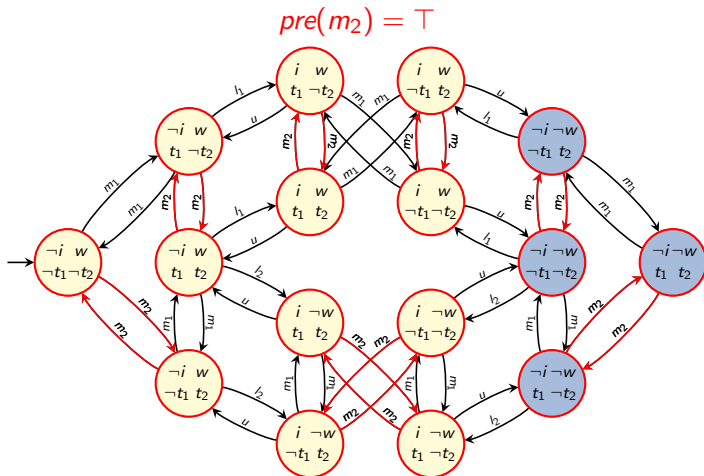
Notes:

- ▶ Operators are also called **actions**.
- ▶ Operators are often written as triples $\langle pre(o), eff(o), cost(o) \rangle$.
- ▶ This can be abbreviated to pairs $\langle pre(o), eff(o) \rangle$ when the cost of the operator is irrelevant.

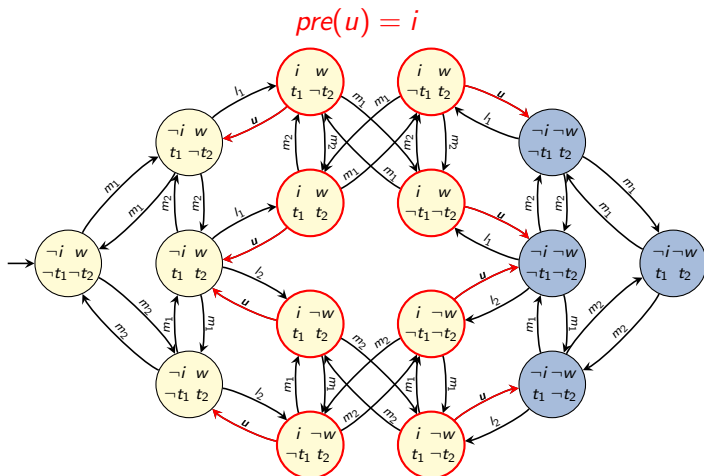
Running Example: Operator Preconditions



Running Example: Operator Preconditions

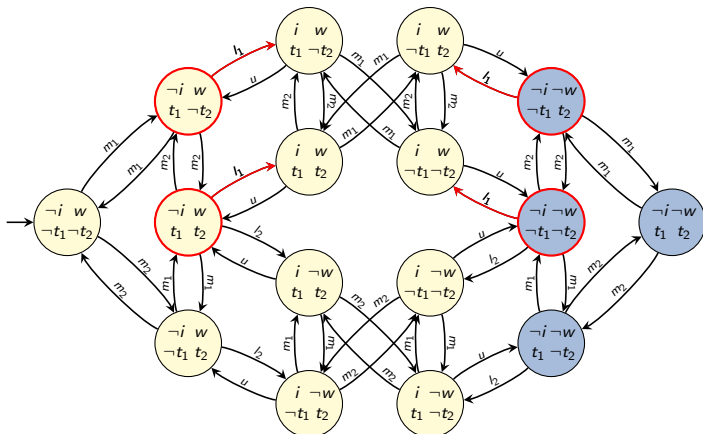


Running Example: Operator Preconditions



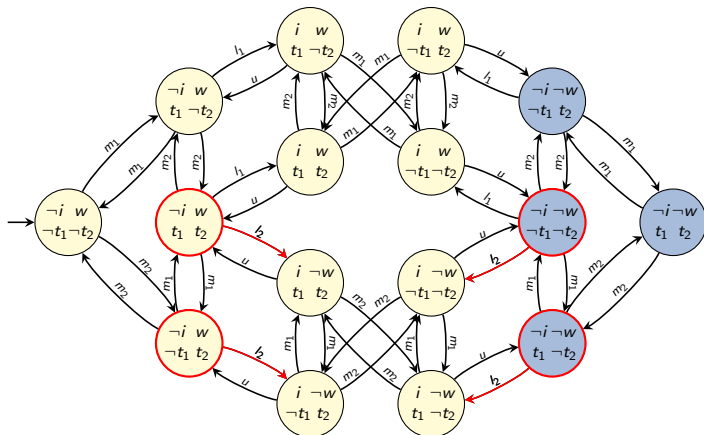
Running Example: Operator Preconditions

$$\text{pre}(h_1) = \neg i \wedge (w \leftrightarrow t_1)$$



Running Example: Operator Preconditions

$$pre(l_2) = \neg i \wedge (w \leftrightarrow t_2)$$



Syntax of Effects

Definition (Effect)

Effects over propositional state variables V are inductively defined as follows:

- ▶ $\top$ is an effect (**empty effect**).
- ▶ If $v \in V$ is a propositional state variable, then v and $\neg v$ are effects (**atomic effect**).
- ▶ If e and e' are effects, then $(e \wedge e')$ is an effect (**conjunctive effect**).
- ▶ If χ is a formula over V and e is an effect, then $(\chi \triangleright e)$ is an effect (**conditional effect**).

We may omit parentheses when this does not cause ambiguity.

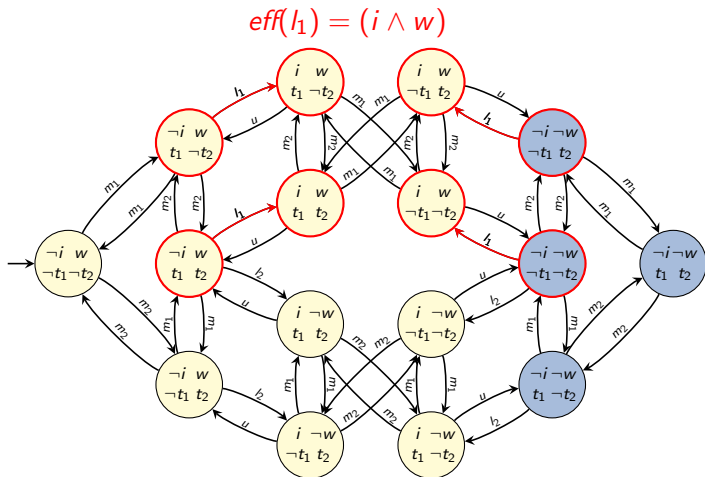
Example: we will later see that $((e \wedge e') \wedge e'')$ behaves identically to $(e \wedge (e' \wedge e''))$ and will write this as $e \wedge e' \wedge e''$.

Effects: Intuition

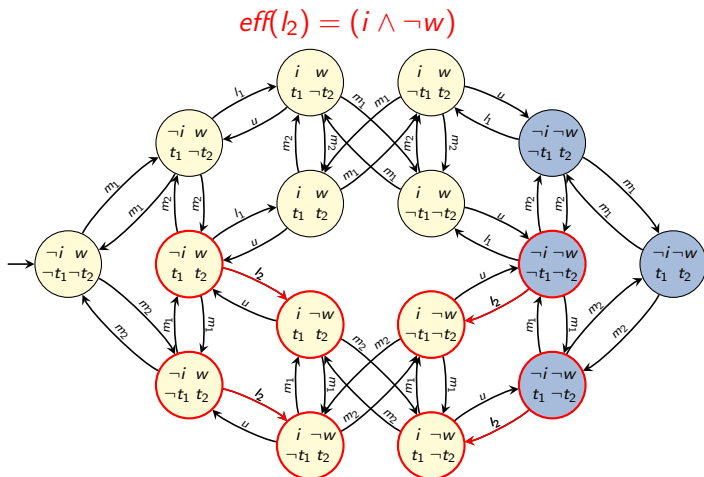
Intuition for effects:

- ▶ The **empty effect** $\top$ changes nothing.
- ▶ **Atomic effects** can be understood as assignments that update the value of a state variable.
 - ▶ v means " $v := \mathbf{T}$ "
 - ▶ $\neg v$ means " $v := \mathbf{F}$ "
- ▶ A **conjunctive effect** $e = (e' \wedge e'')$ means that both subeffects e' and e'' take place simultaneously.
- ▶ A **conditional effect** $e = (\chi \triangleright e')$ means that subeffect e' takes place iff χ is true in the state where e takes place.

Running Example: Operator Effects

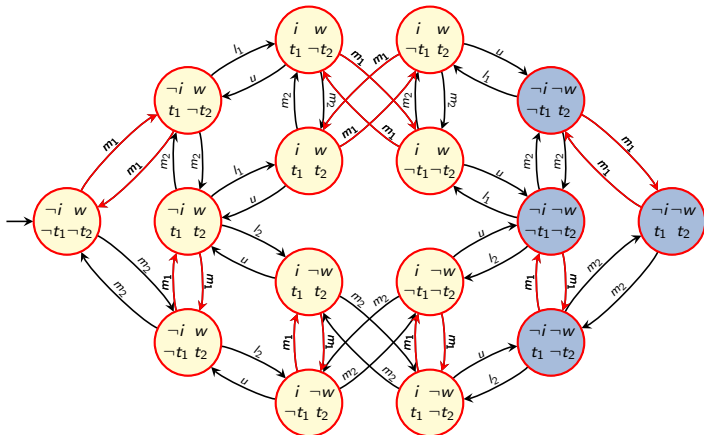


Running Example: Operator Effects



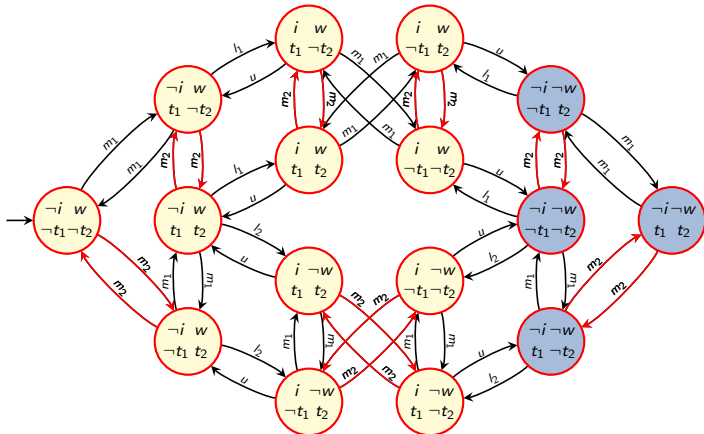
Running Example: Operator Effects

$$\text{eff}(m_1) = ((t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1))$$



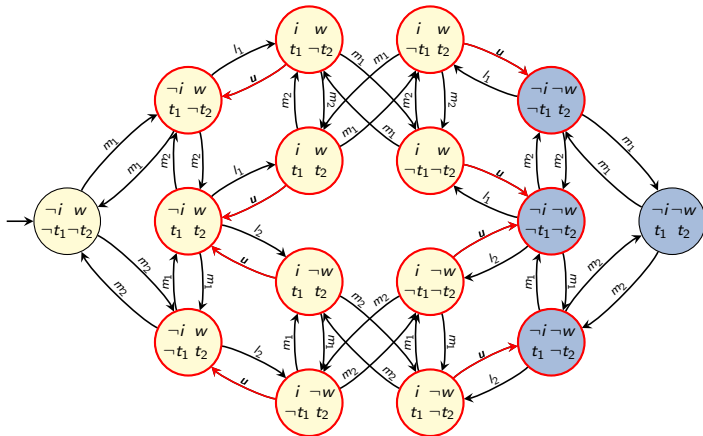
Running Example: Operator Effects

$$\text{eff}(m_2) = ((t_2 \triangleright \neg t_2) \wedge (\neg t_2 \triangleright t_2))$$



Running Example: Operator Effects

$$\begin{aligned} \text{eff}(u) = & \neg i \wedge (w \triangleright ((t_1 \triangleright w) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright \neg w))) \\ & \wedge (\neg w \triangleright ((t_2 \triangleright w) \wedge (\neg t_2 \triangleright \neg w))) \end{aligned}$$



B2.5 Summary

Summary

- ▶ Propositional **state variables** let us compactly describe properties of large transition systems.
- ▶ A **state** is an assignment to a set of state variables.
- ▶ Sets of states are represented as **formulas** over state variables.
- ▶ **Operators** describe **when** (precondition), **how** (effect) and at which **cost** the state of the world can be changed.
- ▶ **Effects** are structured objects including empty, atomic, conjunctive and conditional effects.

Planning and Optimization

B3. Formal Definition of Planning

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 23, 2026

Planning and Optimization

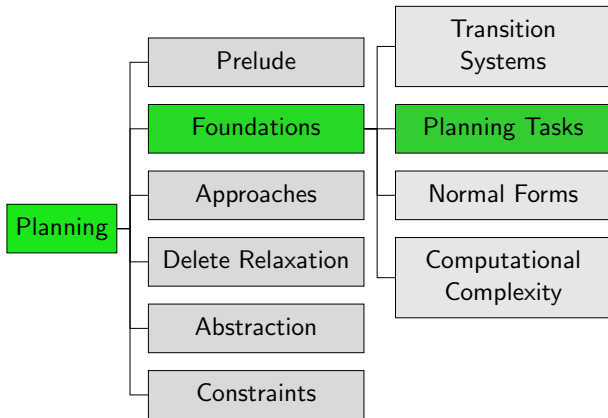
September 23, 2026 — B3. Formal Definition of Planning

B3.1 Semantics of Effects and Operators

B3.2 Planning Tasks

B3.3 Summary

Content of the Course



B3.1 Semantics of Effects and Operators

Semantics of Effects: Trigger Conditions

Definition (Trigger Condition for an Effect)

Let ℓ be an atomic effect, and let e be an effect.

The **trigger condition** or **trigger** $\text{trig}(\ell, e)$ for the firing of ℓ given the effect e is a propositional formula defined as follows:

- ▶ $\text{trig}(\ell, \top) = \perp$
- ▶ $\text{trig}(\ell, e) = \top$ for the atomic effect $e = \ell$
- ▶ $\text{trig}(\ell, e) = \perp$ for all atomic effects $e = \ell' \neq \ell$
- ▶ $\text{trig}(\ell, (e \wedge e')) = (\text{trig}(\ell, e) \vee \text{trig}(\ell, e'))$
- ▶ $\text{trig}(\ell, (\chi \triangleright e)) = (\chi \wedge \text{trig}(\ell, e))$

Intuition: $\text{trig}(\ell, e)$ represents the condition that must be true in the current state for the effect e to lead to the atomic effect ℓ

Trigger Condition: Example (1)

Example

Consider the move operator m_1 from the running example:

$$\text{eff}(m_1) = ((t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1)).$$

Under which conditions does it set t_1 to false?

$$\begin{aligned} \text{trig}(\neg t_1, \text{eff}(m_1)) &= \text{trig}(\neg t_1, ((t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1))) \\ &= \text{trig}(\neg t_1, (t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1)) \vee \\ &\quad \text{trig}(\neg t_1, (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1)) \\ &= (t_1 \wedge \text{trig}(\neg t_1, \neg t_1)) \vee \\ &\quad (\neg t_1 \wedge \text{trig}(\neg t_1, t_1)) \\ &= (t_1 \wedge \top) \vee (\neg t_1 \wedge \perp) \\ &\equiv t_1 \vee \perp \\ &\equiv t_1 \end{aligned}$$

Trigger Condition: Example (2)

Example

Consider the move operator m_1 from the running example:

$$\text{eff}(m_1) = ((t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1)).$$

Under which conditions does it set i to true?

$$\begin{aligned} \text{trig}(i, \text{eff}(m_1)) &= \text{trig}(i, ((t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1))) \\ &= \text{trig}(i, (t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1)) \vee \\ &\quad \text{trig}(i, (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1)) \\ &= (t_1 \wedge \text{trig}(i, \neg t_1)) \vee \\ &\quad (\neg t_1 \wedge \text{trig}(i, t_1)) \\ &= (t_1 \wedge \perp) \vee (\neg t_1 \wedge \perp) \\ &\equiv \perp \vee \perp \\ &\equiv \perp \end{aligned}$$

Trigger Condition: Example (3)

Example

Consider the unload operator u from the running example:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{eff}(u) = & \neg i \wedge (w \triangleright ((t_1 \triangleright w) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright \neg w))) \\ & \wedge (\neg w \triangleright ((t_2 \triangleright w) \wedge (\neg t_2 \triangleright \neg w))). \end{aligned}$$

Under which conditions does it set w to true?

$\rightsquigarrow$ [exercises](#)

Semantics of Effects: Applying an Effect

first attempt:

Definition (Applying Effects)

Let V be a set of propositional state variables.

Let s be a state over V , and let e be an effect over V .

The **resulting state** of applying e in s , written $s[e]$, is the state s' defined as follows for all $v \in V$:

$$s'(v) = \begin{cases} \mathbf{T} & \text{if } s \models \text{trig}(v, e) \\ \mathbf{F} & \text{if } s \models \text{trig}(\neg v, e) \wedge \neg \text{trig}(v, e) \\ s(v) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

What is the problem with this definition?

Semantics of Effects: Applying an Effect

correct definition:

Definition (Applying Effects)

Let V be a set of propositional state variables.

Let s be a state over V , and let e be an effect over V .

The **resulting state** of applying e in s , written $s[e]$, is the state s' defined as follows for all $v \in V$:

$$s'(v) = \begin{cases} \mathbf{T} & \text{if } s \models \text{trig}(v, e) \\ \mathbf{F} & \text{if } s \models \text{trig}(\neg v, e) \wedge \neg \text{trig}(v, e) \\ s(v) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Add-after-Delete Semantics

Note:

- ▶ The definition implies that if a variable is simultaneously “added” (set to **T**) and “deleted” (set to **F**), the value **T** takes precedence.
- ▶ This is called **add-after-delete semantics**.
- ▶ This detail of effect semantics is somewhat arbitrary, but has proven useful in practice.

Semantics of Operators

Definition (Applicable, Applying Operators, Resulting State)

Let V be a set of propositional state variables.

Let s be a state over V , and let o be an operator over V .

Operator o is **applicable** in s if $s \models \text{pre}(o)$.

If o is applicable in s , the **resulting state** of **applying** o in s , written $s[o]$, is the state $s[\text{eff}(o)]$.

B3.2 Planning Tasks

Planning Tasks

Definition (Planning Task)

A (propositional) **planning task** is a 4-tuple $\Pi = \langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$ where

- ▶ V is a finite set of **propositional state variables**,
- ▶ I is an interpretation of V called the **initial state**,
- ▶ O is a finite set of **operators** over V , and
- ▶ γ is a formula over V called the **goal**.

Running Example: Planning Task

Example

From the previous chapter, we see that the running example can be represented by the task $\Pi = \langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$ with

- ▶ $V = \{i, w, t_1, t_2\}$
- ▶ $I = \{i \mapsto \mathbf{F}, w \mapsto \mathbf{T}, t_1 \mapsto \mathbf{F}, t_2 \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$
- ▶ $O = \{m_1, m_2, l_1, l_2, u\}$ where
 - ▶ $m_1 = \langle \top, ((t_1 \triangleright \neg t_1) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright t_1)), 5 \rangle$
 - ▶ $m_2 = \langle \top, ((t_2 \triangleright \neg t_2) \wedge (\neg t_2 \triangleright t_2)), 5 \rangle$
 - ▶ $l_1 = \langle \neg i \wedge (w \leftrightarrow t_1), (i \wedge w), 1 \rangle$
 - ▶ $l_2 = \langle \neg i \wedge (w \leftrightarrow t_2), (i \wedge \neg w), 1 \rangle$
 - ▶ $u = \langle i, \neg i \wedge (w \triangleright ((t_1 \triangleright w) \wedge (\neg t_1 \triangleright \neg w)))$
 $\quad \quad \quad \wedge (\neg w \triangleright ((t_2 \triangleright w) \wedge (\neg t_2 \triangleright \neg w))), 1 \rangle$
- ▶ $\gamma = \neg i \wedge \neg w$

Mapping Planning Tasks to Transition Systems

Definition (Transition System Induced by a Planning Task)

The planning task $\Pi = \langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$ **induces** the transition system $\mathcal{T}(\Pi) = \langle S, L, c, T, s_0, S_\star \rangle$, where

- ▶ S is the set of all states over V ,
- ▶ L is the set of operators O ,
- ▶ $c(o) = \text{cost}(o)$ for all operators $o \in O$,
- ▶ $T = \{ \langle s, o, s' \rangle \mid s \in S, o \text{ applicable in } s, s' = s[o] \}$,
- ▶ $s_0 = I$, and
- ▶ $S_\star = \{ s \in S \mid s \models \gamma \}$.

Planning Tasks: Terminology

- ▶ Terminology for transitions systems is also applied to the planning tasks Π that induce them.
- ▶ For example, when we speak of the **states of Π** , we mean the states of $\mathcal{T}(\Pi)$.
- ▶ A sequence of operators that forms a solution of $\mathcal{T}(\Pi)$ is called a **plan** of Π .

Satisficing and Optimal Planning

By **planning**, we mean the following two algorithmic problems:

Definition (Satisficing Planning)

Given: a planning task Π

Output: a plan for Π , or **unsolvable** if no plan for Π exists

Definition (Optimal Planning)

Given: a planning task Π

Output: a plan for Π with minimal cost among all plans for Π ,
or **unsolvable** if no plan for Π exists

B3.3 Summary

Summary

- ▶ **Planning tasks** compactly represent transition systems and are suitable as inputs for planning algorithms.
- ▶ A planning task consists of a set of **state variables** and an **initial state**, **operators** and **goal** over these state variables.
- ▶ We gave **formal definitions** for these concepts.
- ▶ In **satisficing planning**, we must find a solution for a planning task (or show that no solution exists).
- ▶ In **optimal planning**, we must additionally guarantee that generated solutions are of minimal cost.

Planning and Optimization

B4. Equivalent Operators and Normal Forms

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 28, 2026

Planning and Optimization

September 28, 2026 — B4. Equivalent Operators and Normal Forms

B4.1 Reminder & Motivation

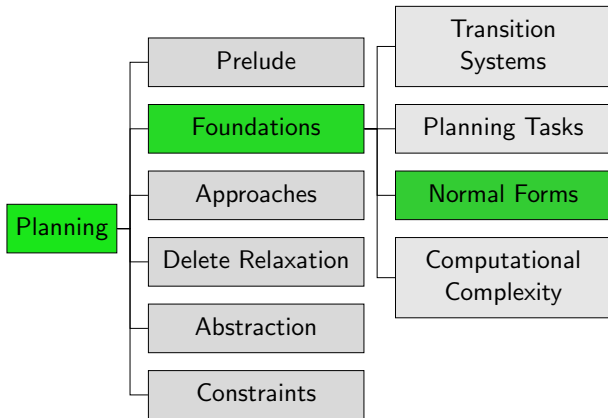
B4.2 Equivalence Transformations

B4.3 Conflict-Free Operators

B4.4 Flat Effects

B4.5 Summary

Content of the Course



B4.1 Reminder & Motivation

Reminder: Syntax of Effects

Definition (Effect)

Effects over propositional state variables V are inductively defined as follows:

- ▶ $\top$ is an effect (**empty effect**).
- ▶ If $v \in V$ is a propositional state variable, then v and $\neg v$ are effects (**atomic effect**).
- ▶ If e and e' are effects, then $(e \wedge e')$ is an effect (**conjunctive effect**).
- ▶ If χ is a formula over V and e is an effect, then $(\chi \triangleright e)$ is an effect (**conditional effect**).

Arbitrary nesting of conjunctive and conditional effects,
e.g. $c \wedge (a \triangleright (\neg b \wedge (c \triangleright (b \wedge \neg d \wedge \neg a)))) \wedge (\neg b \triangleright \neg a)$

$\rightsquigarrow$ Can we make our life easier?

Reminder: Semantics of Effects

- ▶ $\text{trig}(\ell, e)$: condition that must be true in the current state for the effect e to trigger the atomic effect ℓ
- ▶ **add-after-delete semantics**:
if an operator with effect e is applied in state s
and we have **both** $s \models \text{trig}(v, e)$ **and** $s \models \text{trig}(\neg v, e)$,
then $s'(v) = \mathbf{T}$ in the resulting state s' .

This is a very subtle detail.

⇒ Can we make our life easier?

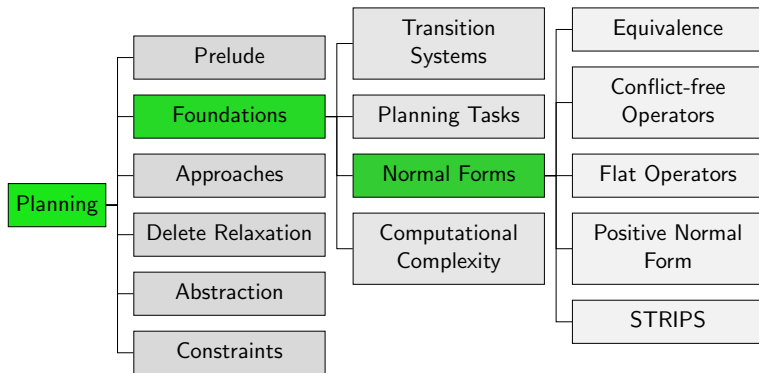
Motivation

Similarly to normal forms in propositional logic (DNF, CNF, NNF), we can define **normal forms for effects, operators and planning tasks**.

Among other things, we consider normal forms that avoid complicated nesting and subtleties of conflicts.

This is useful because algorithms (and proofs) then only need to deal with effects, operators and tasks in normal form.

Content of the Course



Notation: Applying Operator Sequences

Existing notation:

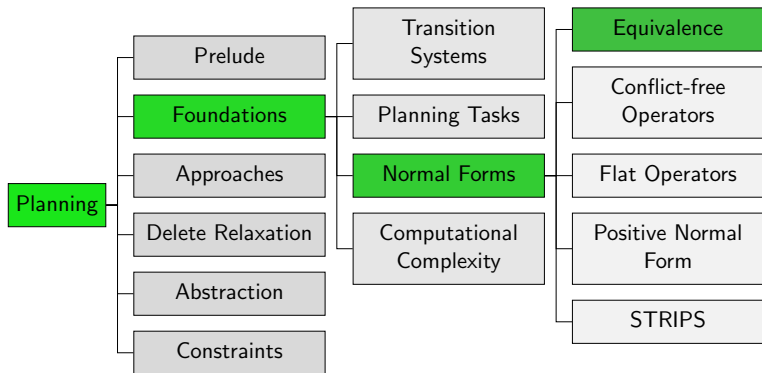
- ▶ We already write $s[o]$ for the resulting state after applying operator o in state s .

New extended notation:

- ▶ For a sequence $\pi = \langle o_1, \dots, o_n \rangle$ of operators that are consecutively applicable in s , we write $s[\pi]$ for $s[o_1][o_2] \dots [o_n]$.
- ▶ This includes the case of an empty operator sequence:
 $s[\langle \rangle] = s$

B4.2 Equivalence Transformations

Content of the Course



Equivalence of Operators and Effects: Definition

Definition (Equivalent Effects)

Two effects e and e' over state variables V are **equivalent**, written $e \equiv e'$, if $s[e] = s[e']$ for all states s .

Definition (Equivalent Operators)

Two operators o and o' over state variables V are **equivalent**, written $o \equiv o'$, if $\text{cost}(o) = \text{cost}(o')$ and for all states s, s' over V , o induces the transition $s \xrightarrow{o} s'$ iff o' induces the transition $s \xrightarrow{o'} s'$.

Equivalence of Operators and Effects: Theorem

Theorem

Let o and o' be operators with $\text{pre}(o) \equiv \text{pre}(o')$, $\text{eff}(o) \equiv \text{eff}(o')$ and $\text{cost}(o) = \text{cost}(o')$. Then $o \equiv o'$.

Note: The converse is not true. (Why not?)

Equivalence Transformations for Effects

$$e \wedge e' \equiv e' \wedge e \quad (1)$$

$$(e \wedge e') \wedge e'' \equiv e \wedge (e' \wedge e'') \quad (2)$$

$$\top \wedge e \equiv e \quad (3)$$

$$\chi \triangleright e \equiv \chi' \triangleright e \quad \text{if } \chi \equiv \chi' \quad (4)$$

$$\top \triangleright e \equiv e \quad (5)$$

$$\perp \triangleright e \equiv \top \quad (6)$$

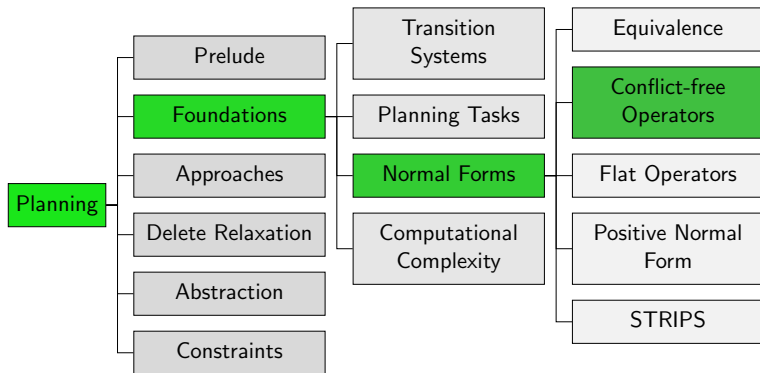
$$\chi \triangleright (\chi' \triangleright e) \equiv (\chi \wedge \chi') \triangleright e \quad (7)$$

$$\chi \triangleright (e \wedge e') \equiv (\chi \triangleright e) \wedge (\chi \triangleright e') \quad (8)$$

$$(\chi \triangleright e) \wedge (\chi' \triangleright e) \equiv (\chi \vee \chi') \triangleright e \quad (9)$$

B4.3 Conflict-Free Operators

Content of the Course



Conflict-Freeness: Motivation

- ▶ The add-after-delete semantics makes effects like $(a \triangleright c) \wedge (b \triangleright \neg c)$ somewhat unintuitive to interpret.
- ↪ What happens in states where $a \wedge b$ is true?
- ▶ It would be nicer if $\text{trig}(\ell, e)$ always were the condition under which the atomic effect ℓ actually materializes (because of add-after-delete, it is not)
- ↪ introduce normal form where “complicated case” never arises

Conflict-Free Effects and Operators

Definition (Conflict-Free)

An **effect** e over propositional state variables V is called **conflict-free** if $\text{trig}(v, e) \wedge \text{trig}(\neg v, e)$ is unsatisfiable for all $v \in V$.

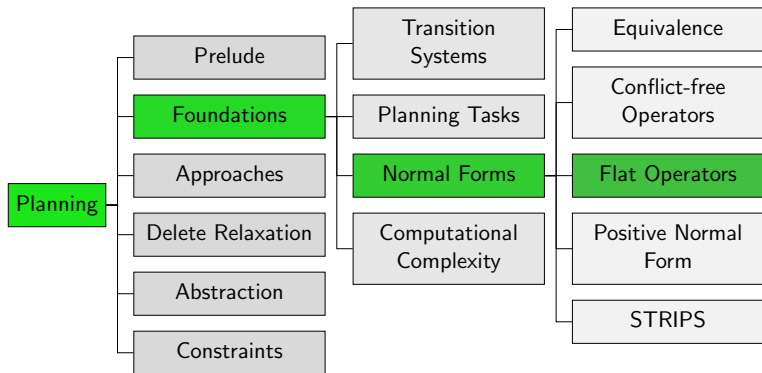
An **operator** o is called **conflict-free** if $\text{eff}(o)$ is conflict-free.

Making Operators Conflict-Free

- ▶ In general, testing whether an operator is conflict-free is a coNP-complete problem. (Why?)
- ▶ However, we do not necessarily need such a test. Instead, we can **produce** an equivalent conflict-free operator in polynomial time.
- ▶ **Algorithm:** given operator o , replace all atomic effects of the form $\neg v$ by $(\neg \text{trig}(v, \text{eff}(o)) \triangleright \neg v)$.
The resulting operator o' is conflict-free and $o \equiv o'$. (Why?)

B4.4 Flat Effects

Content of the Course



Flat Effects: Motivation

- ▶ CNF and DNF limit the **nesting** of connectives in propositional logic.
- ▶ For example, a CNF formula is
 - ▶ a conjunction of 0 or more subformulas,
 - ▶ each of which is a disjunction of 0 or more subformulas,
 - ▶ each of which is a literal.
- ▶ Similarly, we can define a normal form that limits the nesting of effects.
- ▶ This is useful because we then do not have to consider arbitrarily structured effects, e.g., when representing them in a planning algorithm.

Flat Effect

Definition (Flat Effect)

An effect is **simple** if it is either an atomic effect or of the form $(\chi \triangleright e)$, where e is an atomic effect.

An effect e is **flat** if it is a conjunction of 0 or more simple effects, and none of these simple effects include the same atomic effect.

An operator o is **flat** if $\text{eff}(o)$ is flat.

Notes: analogously to CNF, we consider

- ▶ a single simple effect as a conjunction of 1 simple effect
- ▶ the empty effect as a conjunction of 0 simple effects

Flat Effect: Example

Example

Consider the effect

$$c \wedge (a \triangleright (\neg b \wedge (c \triangleright (b \wedge \neg d \wedge \neg a)))) \wedge (\neg b \triangleright \neg a)$$

An equivalent flat (and conflict-free) effect is

$$\begin{aligned} &c \wedge \\ &((a \wedge \neg c) \triangleright \neg b) \wedge \\ &((a \wedge c) \triangleright b) \wedge \\ &((a \wedge c) \triangleright \neg d) \wedge \\ &((\neg b \vee (a \wedge c)) \triangleright \neg a) \end{aligned}$$

Note: if we want, we can write c as $(\top \triangleright c)$ to make the structure even more uniform, with each simple effect having a condition.

Producing Flat Operators

Theorem

For every operator, an equivalent flat operator and an equivalent flat, conflict-free operator can be computed in polynomial time.

Producing Flat Operators: Proof

Proof Sketch.

Replace the effect e over variables V by

$$\bigwedge_{v \in V} (\text{trig}(v, e) \triangleright v) \\ \wedge \bigwedge_{v \in V} (\text{trig}(\neg v, e) \triangleright \neg v),$$

which is an equivalent flat effect.

To additionally obtain conflict-freeness, use

$$\bigwedge_{v \in V} (\text{trig}(v, e) \triangleright v) \\ \wedge \bigwedge_{v \in V} ((\text{trig}(\neg v, e) \wedge \neg \text{trig}(v, e)) \triangleright \neg v)$$

instead.

(Conjuncts of the form $(\chi \triangleright e)$ where $\chi \equiv \perp$ can be omitted to simplify the effect.)

B4.5 Summary

Summary

- ▶ **Equivalences** can be used to simplify operators and effects.
- ▶ In **conflict-free** operators, the “complicated case” of operator semantics does not arise.
- ▶ For **flat** operators, the only permitted nesting is atomic effects within conditional effects within conjunctive effects, and all atomic effects must be distinct.
- ▶ For flat, conflict-free operators, it is easy to determine the **condition** under which a given **literal** is **made true** by applying the operator in a given state.
- ▶ Every operator can be **transformed** into an equivalent **flat and conflict-free** one in **polynomial time**.

Planning and Optimization

B5. Positive Normal Form and STRIPS

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 28, 2026

Planning and Optimization

September 28, 2026 — B5. Positive Normal Form and STRIPS

B5.1 Motivation

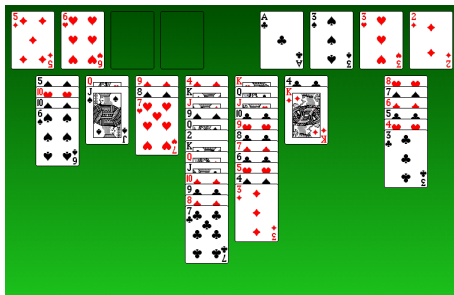
B5.2 Positive Normal Form

B5.3 STRIPS

B5.4 Summary

B5.1 Motivation

Example: Freecell



Example (Good and Bad Effects)

If we move $K\heartsuit$ to a free tableau position,
the **good effect** is that $4\clubsuit$ is now accessible.

The **bad effect** is that we lose one free tableau position.

What is a Good or Bad Effect?

Question: Which operator effects are good, and which are bad?

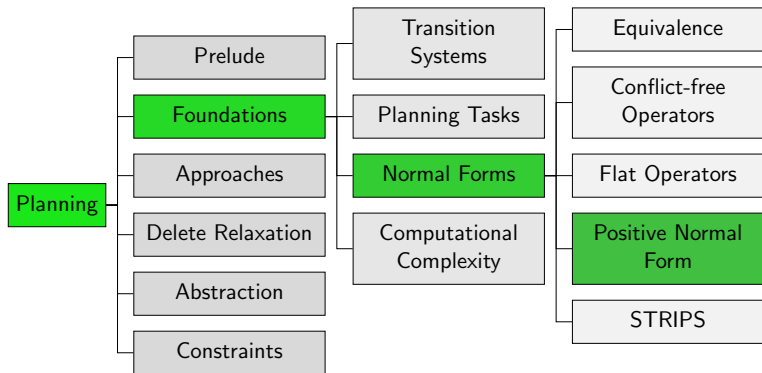
Difficult to answer in general, because it depends on context:

- ▶ Locking our door is **good** if we want to keep burglars out.
- ▶ Locking our door is **bad** if we want to enter.

We now consider a reformulation of propositional planning tasks that makes the distinction between good and bad effects obvious.

B5.2 Positive Normal Form

Content of the Course



Positive Formulas, Operators and Tasks

Definition (Positive Formula)

A logical formula φ is **positive** if no negation symbols appear in φ .

Note: This includes the negation symbols implied by $\rightarrow$ and $\leftrightarrow$.

Definition (Positive Operator)

An operator o is **positive** if $pre(o)$ and all effect conditions in $eff(o)$ are positive.

Definition (Positive Propositional Planning Task)

A propositional planning task $\langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$ is **positive** if all operators in O and the goal γ are positive.

Positive Normal Form

Definition (Operator in Positive Normal Form)

An operator o is in **positive normal form** if it is positive and flat.

Definition (Planning Task in Positive Normal Form)

A propositional planning task $\langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$ is in **positive normal form** if all operators in O are in positive normal form and the goal γ is positive.

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike-locked\}$$

$$I = \{home \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike-locked \mapsto \mathbf{T}, \\ uni \mapsto \mathbf{F}, lecture \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$$

$$O = \{\langle home \wedge bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, \neg home \wedge uni \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike-locked, \neg bike-locked \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, bike-locked \rangle, \\ \langle uni, lecture \wedge ((bike \wedge \neg bike-locked) \triangleright \neg bike) \rangle\}$$

$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike-locked\}$$

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$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Identify state variable v occurring negatively in conditions.

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike\text{-}locked, \textcolor{red}{bike\text{-}unlocked}\}$$

$$I = \{home \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike\text{-}locked \mapsto \mathbf{T}, \\ uni \mapsto \mathbf{F}, lecture \mapsto \mathbf{F}, \textcolor{red}{bike\text{-}unlocked} \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$$

$$O = \{\langle home \wedge bike \wedge \neg bike\text{-}locked, \neg home \wedge uni \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike\text{-}locked, \neg bike\text{-}locked \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge \neg bike\text{-}locked, bike\text{-}locked \rangle, \\ \langle uni, lecture \wedge ((bike \wedge \neg bike\text{-}locked) \triangleright \neg bike) \rangle\}$$

$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Introduce new variable $\hat{v}$ with complementary initial value.

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike-locked, bike-unlocked\}$$

$$I = \{home \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike-locked \mapsto \mathbf{T}, \\ uni \mapsto \mathbf{F}, lecture \mapsto \mathbf{F}, bike-unlocked \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$$

$$O = \{\langle home \wedge bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, \neg home \wedge uni \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike-locked, \neg bike-locked \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, bike-locked \rangle, \\ \langle uni, lecture \wedge ((bike \wedge \neg bike-locked) \triangleright \neg bike) \rangle\}$$

$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Identify effects on variable v .

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike-locked, bike-unlocked\}$$

$$I = \{home \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike-locked \mapsto \mathbf{T}, \\ uni \mapsto \mathbf{F}, lecture \mapsto \mathbf{F}, bike-unlocked \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$$

$$O = \{\langle home \wedge bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, \neg home \wedge uni \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike-locked, \neg bike-locked \wedge bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, bike-locked \wedge \neg bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle uni, lecture \wedge ((bike \wedge \neg bike-locked) \triangleright \neg bike) \rangle\}$$

$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Introduce complementary effects for $\hat{v}$.

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike-locked, bike-unlocked\}$$

$$I = \{home \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike-locked \mapsto \mathbf{T}, \\ uni \mapsto \mathbf{F}, lecture \mapsto \mathbf{F}, bike-unlocked \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$$

$$O = \{\langle home \wedge bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, \neg home \wedge uni \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike-locked, \neg bike-locked \wedge bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge \neg bike-locked, bike-locked \wedge \neg bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle uni, lecture \wedge ((bike \wedge \neg bike-locked) \supset \neg bike) \rangle\}$$

$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Identify negative conditions for v .

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike-locked, bike-unlocked\}$$

$$I = \{home \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike-locked \mapsto \mathbf{T}, \\ uni \mapsto \mathbf{F}, lecture \mapsto \mathbf{F}, bike-unlocked \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$$

$$O = \{\langle home \wedge bike \wedge \textcolor{red}{bike-unlocked}, \neg home \wedge uni \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike-locked, \neg bike-locked \wedge bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge \textcolor{red}{bike-unlocked}, bike-locked \wedge \neg bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle uni, lecture \wedge ((bike \wedge \textcolor{red}{bike-unlocked}) \triangleright \neg bike) \rangle\}$$

$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Replace by positive condition $\hat{v}$.

Positive Normal Form: Example

Example (Transformation to Positive Normal Form)

$$V = \{home, uni, lecture, bike, bike-locked, bike-unlocked\}$$

$$I = \{home \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike \mapsto \mathbf{T}, bike-locked \mapsto \mathbf{T}, \\ uni \mapsto \mathbf{F}, lecture \mapsto \mathbf{F}, bike-unlocked \mapsto \mathbf{F}\}$$

$$O = \{\langle home \wedge bike \wedge bike-unlocked, \neg home \wedge uni \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike-locked, \neg bike-locked \wedge bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle bike \wedge bike-unlocked, bike-locked \wedge \neg bike-unlocked \rangle, \\ \langle uni, lecture \wedge ((bike \wedge bike-unlocked) \triangleright \neg bike) \rangle\}$$

$$\gamma = lecture \wedge bike$$

Positive Normal Form: Existence

Theorem (Positive Normal Form)

For every propositional planning task Π , there is an equivalent propositional planning task Π' in positive normal form.

Moreover, Π' can be computed from Π in polynomial time.

Note: Equivalence here means that the transition systems induced by Π and Π' , **restricted to the reachable states**, are isomorphic.

We prove the theorem by describing a suitable algorithm.
(However, we do not prove its correctness or complexity.)

Positive Normal Form: Algorithm

Transformation of $\langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$ to Positive Normal Form

Replace all operators with equivalent conflict-free operators.

Convert all conditions to negation normal form (NNF).

while any condition contains a negative literal $\neg v$:

Let v be a variable which occurs negatively in a condition.

$V := V \cup \{\hat{v}\}$ for some new propositional state variable $\hat{v}$

$$I(\hat{v}) := \begin{cases} \mathbf{F} & \text{if } I(v) = \mathbf{T} \\ \mathbf{T} & \text{if } I(v) = \mathbf{F} \end{cases}$$

Replace the effect v by $(v \wedge \neg \hat{v})$ in all operators $o \in O$.

Replace the effect $\neg v$ by $(\neg v \wedge \hat{v})$ in all operators $o \in O$.

Replace $\neg v$ by $\hat{v}$ in all conditions.

Convert all operators $o \in O$ to flat operators.

Here, **all conditions** refers to all operator preconditions, operator effect conditions and the goal.

Why Positive Normal Form is Interesting

In the **absence of conditional effects**, positive normal form allows us to distinguish good and bad effects easily:

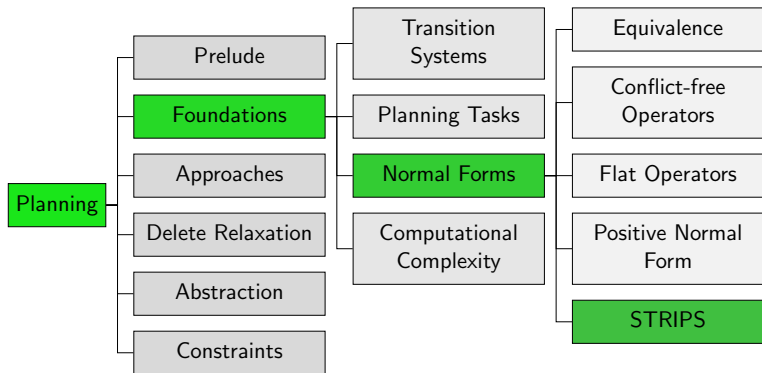
- ▶ Effects that make state variables true (**add effects**) are good.
- ▶ Effects that make state variables false (**delete effects**) are bad.

This is particularly useful for planning algorithms based on **delete relaxation**, which we will study in Part D.

(Why restriction “in the absence of conditional effects”?)

B5.3 STRIPS

Content of the Course



STRIPS Operators and Planning Tasks

Definition (STRIPS Operator)

An operator o of a prop. planning task is a **STRIPS operator** if

- ▶ $pre(o)$ is a conjunction of state variables, and
- ▶ $eff(o)$ is a conflict-free conjunction of atomic effects.

Definition (STRIPS Planning Task)

A propositional planning task $\langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$ is a **STRIPS planning task** if all operators $o \in O$ are STRIPS operators and γ is a conjunction of state variables.

Note: STRIPS operators are conflict-free and flat.

STRIPS is a special case of positive normal form.

STRIPS Operators: Remarks

- ▶ Every STRIPS operator is of the form

$$\langle v_1 \wedge \dots \wedge v_n, \ell_1 \wedge \dots \wedge \ell_m \rangle$$

where v_i are state variables and ℓ_j are atomic effects.

- ▶ Often, STRIPS operators o are described via three **sets of state variables**:
 - ▶ the **preconditions** (state variables occurring in $pre(o)$)
 - ▶ the **add effects** (state variables occurring positively in $eff(o)$)
 - ▶ the **delete effects** (state variables occurring negatively in $eff(o)$)
- ▶ Definitions of STRIPS in the literature often do **not** require conflict-freeness. But it is easy to achieve and makes many things simpler.
- ▶ There exists a variant called **STRIPS with negation** where negative literals are also allowed in conditions.

Why STRIPS is Interesting

- ▶ STRIPS is **particularly simple**, yet expressive enough to capture general planning tasks.
- ▶ In particular, STRIPS planning is **no easier** than planning in general (as we will see in Chapters B6–B7).
- ▶ Many algorithms in the planning literature are **only presented for STRIPS planning tasks** (generalization is often, but not always, obvious).

STRIPS

STanford Research Institute Problem Solver
(Fikes & Nilsson, 1971)

Transformation to STRIPS

- ▶ Not every operator is equivalent to a STRIPS operator.
- ▶ However, each operator can be transformed into a **set** of STRIPS operators whose “combination” is equivalent to the original operator. (How?)
- ▶ However, this transformation may exponentially increase the number of operators. There are planning tasks for which such a blow-up is unavoidable.
- ▶ There are polynomial transformations of propositional planning tasks to STRIPS, but these do not lead to isomorphic transition systems (auxiliary states are needed). (They are, however, equivalent in a weaker sense.)

B5.4 Summary

Summary

- ▶ A **positive** task helps distinguish good and bad effects.
- ▶ A positive task with flat operators is in **positive normal form**.
- ▶ **STRIPS** is even more restrictive than positive normal form, forbidding complex preconditions and conditional effects.
- ▶ Both forms are expressive enough to capture general propositional planning tasks.
- ▶ Transformation to positive normal form is possible with polynomial size increase.
- ▶ Isomorphic transformations of propositional planning tasks to STRIPS can increase the number of operators exponentially; non-isomorphic polynomial transformations exist.

Planning and Optimization

B6. Computational Complexity of Planning: Background

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

September 30, 2026

Planning and Optimization

September 30, 2026 — B6. Computational Complexity of Planning: Background

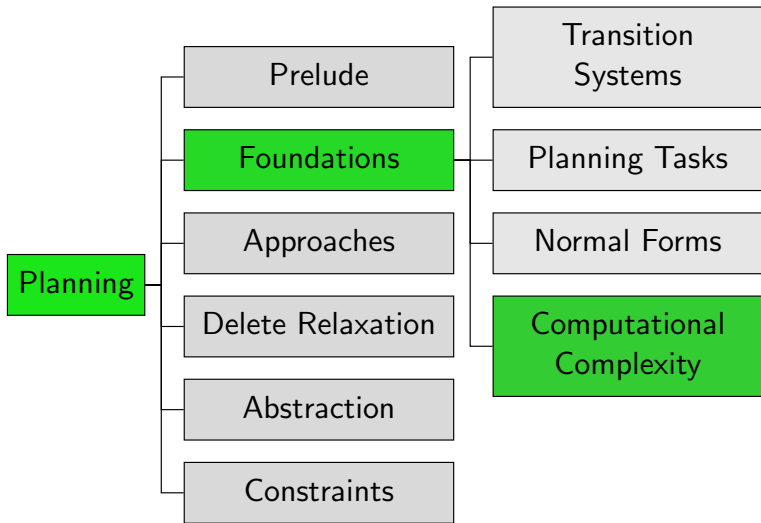
B6.1 Motivation

B6.2 Turing Machines

B6.3 Complexity Classes

B6.4 Summary

Content of the Course



B6.1 Motivation

How Difficult is Planning?

- ▶ Using **state-space search** (e.g., using Dijkstra's algorithm on the transition system), planning can be solved in **polynomial time** in the **number of states**.
- ▶ However, the number of states is **exponential** in the number of **state variables**, and hence in general exponential in the size of the input to the planning algorithm.
- ~> Do non-exponential planning algorithms exist?
- ~> What is the precise **computational complexity** of planning?

Why Computational Complexity?

- ▶ **understand** the problem
- ▶ know what is **not** possible
- ▶ find interesting **subproblems** that are easier to solve
- ▶ distinguish **essential features** from **syntactic sugar**
 - ▶ Is STRIPS planning easier than general planning?

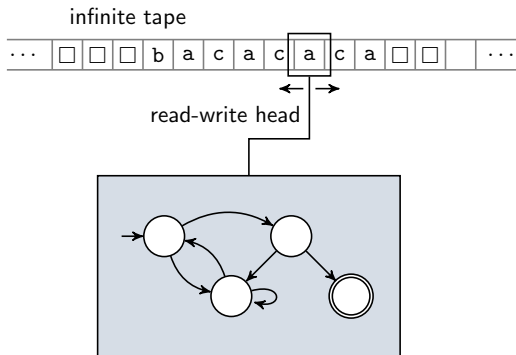
Reminder: Complexity Theory

Need to Catch Up?

- ▶ We assume knowledge of complexity theory:
 - ▶ languages and decision problems
 - ▶ Turing machines: NTMs and DTMs;
polynomial equivalence with other models of computation
 - ▶ complexity classes: P, NP, PSPACE
 - ▶ polynomial reductions
- ▶ If you are not familiar with these topics, we recommend Chapters B11, D1–D3, D6 of the Theory of Computer Science course at <https://dmi.unibas.ch/en/studies/computer-science/course-offer-spring-2026/10948-main-lecture-theory-of-computer-science/>

B6.2 Turing Machines

Turing Machines: Conceptually



Turing Machines

Definition (Nondeterministic Turing Machine)

A **nondeterministic Turing machine (NTM)** is a 6-tuple $\langle \Sigma, \square, Q, q_0, q_Y, \delta \rangle$ with the following components:

- ▶ **input alphabet** Σ and **blank symbol** $\square \notin \Sigma$
 - ▶ alphabets always nonempty and finite
 - ▶ **tape alphabet** $\Sigma_{\square} = \Sigma \cup \{\square\}$
- ▶ finite set Q of **internal states** with **initial state** $q_0 \in Q$ and **accepting state** $q_Y \in Q$
 - ▶ **nonterminal states** $Q' := Q \setminus \{q_Y\}$
- ▶ **transition relation** $\delta : (Q' \times \Sigma_{\square}) \rightarrow 2^{Q \times \Sigma_{\square} \times \{-1, +1\}}$

Deterministic Turing machine (DTM):

$$|\delta(q, s)| = 1 \text{ for all } \langle q, s \rangle \in Q' \times \Sigma_{\square}$$

Turing Machines: Accepted Words

► Initial configuration

- state q_0
- input word on tape, all other tape cells contain $\square$
- head on first symbol of input word

► Step

- If in state q , reading symbol s , and $\langle q', s', d \rangle \in \delta(q, s)$ then
- the NTM **can** transition to state q' , replacing s with s' and moving the head one cell to the left/right ($d = -1/+1$).
- Input word ($\in \Sigma^*$) is **accepted** if **some** sequence of transitions brings the NTM from the initial configuration into state q_Y .

B6.3 Complexity Classes

Acceptance in Time and Space

Definition (Acceptance of a Language in Time/Space)

Let $f : \mathbb{N}_0 \rightarrow \mathbb{N}_0$.

A NTM **accepts** language $L \subseteq \Sigma^*$ **in time f** if it accepts each $w \in L$ within $f(|w|)$ steps and does not accept any $w \notin L$ (in any time).

It **accepts** language $L \subseteq \Sigma^*$ **in space f** if it accepts each $w \in L$ using at most $f(|w|)$ tape cells and does not accept any $w \notin L$.

Time and Space Complexity Classes

Definition (DTIME, NTIME, DSPACE, NSPACE)

Let $f : \mathbb{N}_0 \rightarrow \mathbb{N}_0$.

Complexity class **DTIME**(f) contains all languages accepted in time f by some DTM.

Complexity class **NTIME**(f) contains all languages accepted in time f by some NTM.

Complexity class **DSPACE**(f) contains all languages accepted in space f by some DTM.

Complexity class **NSPACE**(f) contains all languages accepted in space f by some NTM.

Polynomial Time and Space Classes

Let $\mathcal{P}$ be the set of polynomials $p : \mathbb{N}_0 \rightarrow \mathbb{N}_0$ whose coefficients are natural numbers.

Definition (P, NP, PSPACE, NPSPACE)

$$P = \bigcup_{p \in \mathcal{P}} \text{DTIME}(p)$$

$$NP = \bigcup_{p \in \mathcal{P}} \text{NTIME}(p)$$

$$\text{PSPACE} = \bigcup_{p \in \mathcal{P}} \text{DSpace}(p)$$

$$\text{NPSPACE} = \bigcup_{p \in \mathcal{P}} \text{NSpace}(p)$$

Polynomial Complexity Class Relationships

Theorem (Complexity Class Hierarchy)

$$P \subseteq NP \subseteq PSPACE = NPSPACE$$

Proof.

$P \subseteq NP$ and $PSPACE \subseteq NPSPACE$ are obvious because deterministic Turing machines are a special case of nondeterministic ones.

$NP \subseteq PSPACE$ holds because a Turing machine can only visit polynomially many tape cells within polynomial time.

$PSPACE = NPSPACE$ is a special case of a classical result known as Savitch's theorem (Savitch 1970). □

B6.4 Summary

Summary

- ▶ We recalled the definitions of the most important **complexity classes** from complexity theory:
 - ▶ **P**: decision problems solvable in **polynomial time**
 - ▶ **NP**: decision problems solvable in **polynomial time** by **nondeterministic** algorithms
 - ▶ **PSPACE**: decision problems solvable in **polynomial space**
 - ▶ **NPSPACE**: decision problems solvable in **polynomial space** by **nondeterministic** algorithms
- ▶ These classes are related by $P \subseteq NP \subseteq PSPACE = NPSPACE$.

Planning and Optimization

B7. Computational Complexity of Planning: Results

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

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Planning and Optimization

September 30, 2026 — B7. Computational Complexity of Planning: Results

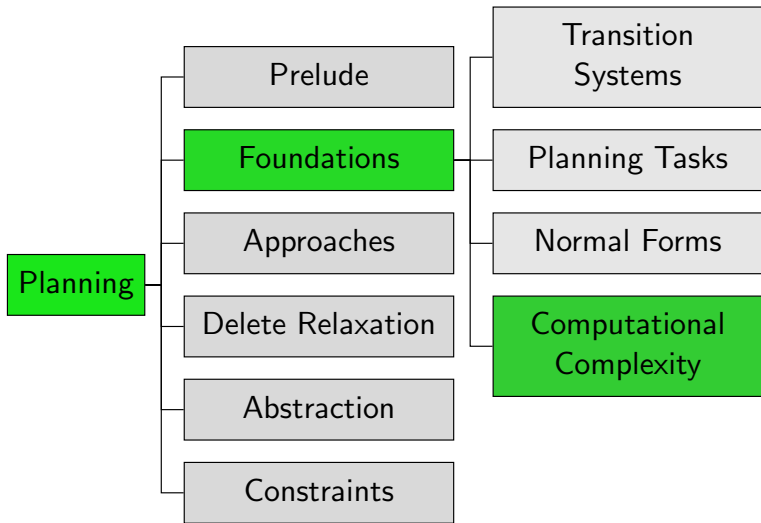
B7.1 (Bounded-Cost) Plan Existence

B7.2 PSPACE-Completeness of Planning

B7.3 More Complexity Results

B7.4 Summary

Content of the Course



B7.1 (Bounded-Cost) Plan Existence

Decision Problems for Planning

Definition (Plan Existence)

Plan existence (PLANEX) is the following decision problem:

GIVEN: planning task Π

QUESTION: Is there a plan for Π ?

$\rightsquigarrow$ decision problem analogue of **satisficing planning**

Definition (Bounded-Cost Plan Existence)

Bounded-cost plan existence (BCPLANEX)

is the following decision problem:

GIVEN: planning task Π , cost bound $K \in \mathbb{N}_0$

QUESTION: Is there a plan for Π with cost at most K ?

$\rightsquigarrow$ decision problem analogue of **optimal planning**

Plan Existence vs. Bounded-Cost Plan Existence

Theorem (Reduction from PLANEX to BCPLANEX)

$$\text{PLANEX} \leq_p \text{BCPLANEX}$$

Proof.

Consider a planning task Π with state variables V .

Let $c_{\max}$ be the maximal cost of all operators of Π .

Compute the number of states of Π as $N = 2^{|V|}$.

Π is solvable iff there is solution with cost at most $c_{\max} \cdot (N - 1)$ because a solution need not visit any state twice.

$\rightsquigarrow$ map instance Π of PLANEX to instance $\langle \Pi, c_{\max} \cdot (N - 1) \rangle$ of BCPLANEX

$\rightsquigarrow$ polynomial reduction



B7.2 PSPACE-Completeness of Planning

Membership in PSPACE

Theorem

$\text{BCPLANEX} \in \text{PSPACE}$

Proof.

Show $\text{BCPLANEX} \in \text{NPSPACE}$ and use Savitch's theorem.

Nondeterministic algorithm:

```
def plan( $\langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle, K$ ):  
     $s := I$   
     $k := K$   
    loop forever:  
        if  $s \models \gamma$ : accept  
        guess  $o \in O$   
        if  $o$  is not applicable in  $s$ : fail  
        if  $\text{cost}(o) > k$ : fail  
         $s := s[o]$   
         $k := k - \text{cost}(o)$ 
```



PSPACE-Hardness

Idea: generic reduction

- ▶ For an arbitrary fixed DTM M with space bound polynomial p and input w , generate propositional planning task which is solvable iff M accepts w in space $p(|w|)$.
- ▶ Without loss of generality, we assume $p(n) \geq n$ for all n .

Reduction: State Variables

Let $M = \langle \Sigma, \square, Q, q_0, q_Y, \delta \rangle$ be the fixed DTM, and let p be its space-bound polynomial.

Given input $w_1 \dots w_n$, define **relevant tape positions** $X := \{-p(n), \dots, p(n)\}$

State Variables

- ▶ state_q for all $q \in Q$
- ▶ head_i for all $i \in X \cup \{-p(n) - 1, p(n) + 1\}$
- ▶ $\text{content}_{i,a}$ for all $i \in X, a \in \Sigma_\square$

$\rightsquigarrow$ allows encoding a Turing machine configuration

Reduction: Initial State

Let $M = \langle \Sigma, \square, Q, q_0, q_Y, \delta \rangle$ be the fixed DTM,
and let p be its space-bound polynomial.

Given input $w_1 \dots w_n$, define **relevant tape positions**
 $X := \{-p(n), \dots, p(n)\}$

Initial State

Initially true:

- ▶ state_{q_0}
- ▶ head_1
- ▶ $\text{content}_{i, w_i}$ for all $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$
- ▶ $\text{content}_{i, \square}$ for all $i \in X \setminus \{1, \dots, n\}$

Initially false:

- ▶ all others

Reduction: Operators

Let $M = \langle \Sigma, \square, Q, q_0, q_Y, \delta \rangle$ be the fixed DTM,
and let p be its space-bound polynomial.

Given input $w_1 \dots w_n$, define **relevant tape positions**
 $X := \{-p(n), \dots, p(n)\}$

Operators

One operator for each transition rule $\delta(q, a) = \langle q', a', d \rangle$
and each cell position $i \in X$:

- ▶ precondition: $\text{state}_q \wedge \text{head}_i \wedge \text{content}_{i,a}$
- ▶ effect: $\neg \text{state}_q \wedge \neg \text{head}_i \wedge \neg \text{content}_{i,a}$
 $\quad \wedge \text{state}_{q'} \wedge \text{head}_{i+d} \wedge \text{content}_{i,a'}$

Note that add-after-delete semantics are important here!

Reduction: Goal

Let $M = \langle \Sigma, \square, Q, q_0, q_Y, \delta \rangle$ be the fixed DTM,
and let p be its space-bound polynomial.

Given input $w_1 \dots w_n$, define **relevant tape positions**
 $X := \{-p(n), \dots, p(n)\}$

Goal

state _{q_Y}

PSPACE-Completeness of STRIPS Plan Existence

Theorem (PSPACE-Completeness; Bylander, 1994)

PLANEX and BCPLANEX are PSPACE-complete.

This is true even if only STRIPS tasks are allowed.

Proof.

Membership for BCPLANEX was already shown.

Hardness for PLANEX follows because we just presented a polynomial reduction from an arbitrary problem in PSPACE to PLANEX . (Note that the reduction only generates STRIPS tasks, after trivial cleanup to make them conflict-free.)

Membership for PLANEX and hardness for BCPLANEX follow from the polynomial reduction from PLANEX to BCPLANEX . $\square$

B7.3 More Complexity Results

More Complexity Results

In addition to the basic complexity result presented in this chapter, there are many special cases, generalizations, variations and related problems studied in the literature:

- ▶ different **planning formalisms**
 - ▶ e.g., nondeterministic effects, partial observability, schematic operators, numerical state variables
- ▶ **syntactic restrictions** of planning tasks
 - ▶ e.g., without preconditions, without conjunctive effects, STRIPS without delete effects
- ▶ **semantic restrictions** of planning task
 - ▶ e.g., restricting variable dependencies (“causal graphs”)
- ▶ **particular planning domains**
 - ▶ e.g., Blocksworld, Logistics, FreeCell

Complexity Results for Different Planning Formalisms

Some results for different planning formalisms:

- ▶ **nondeterministic effects:**
 - ▶ fully observable: EXP-complete (Littman, 1997)
 - ▶ unobservable: EXPSPACE-complete (Haslum & Jonsson, 1999)
 - ▶ partially observable: 2-EXP-complete (Rintanen, 2004)
- ▶ **schematic operators:**
 - ▶ usually adds one exponential level to PLANEX complexity
 - ▶ e.g., classical case EXPSPACE-complete (Erol et al., 1995)
- ▶ **numerical state variables:**
 - ▶ undecidable in most variations (Helmert, 2002)
 - ▶ decidable in restricted setting with at most two numeric state variables (Helal and Lakemeyer, 2025)

B7.4 Summary

Summary

- ▶ Classical planning is PSPACE-complete.
- ▶ This is true both for satisficing and optimal planning (rather, the corresponding decision problems).
- ▶ The hardness proof is a polynomial reduction that translates an arbitrary polynomial-space DTM into a STRIPS task:
 - ▶ DTM configurations are encoded by state variables.
 - ▶ Operators simulate transitions between DTM configurations.
 - ▶ The DTM accepts an input iff there is a plan for the corresponding STRIPS task.
- ▶ This implies that there is no polynomial algorithm for classical planning unless $P = PSPACE$.
- ▶ It also means that planning is not polynomially reducible to any problem in NP unless $NP = PSPACE$.

Planning and Optimization

C1. Overview of Classical Planning Algorithms (Part 1)

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

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Planning and Optimization

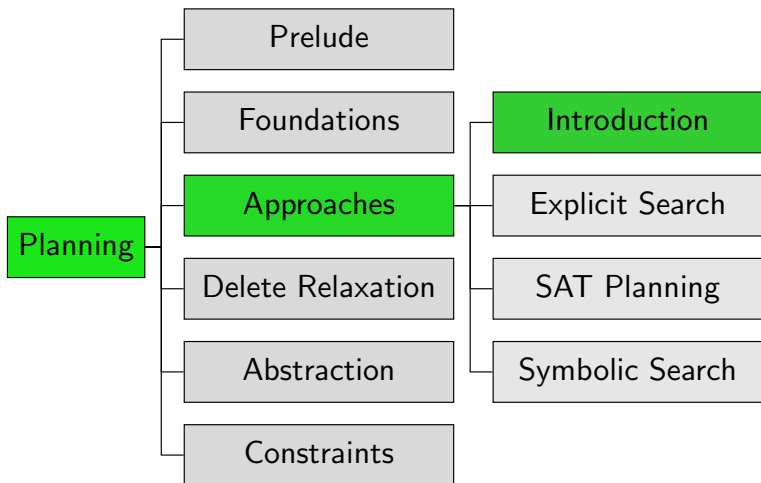
October 5, 2026 — C1. Overview of Classical Planning Algorithms (Part 1)

C1.1 The Big Three

C1.2 Explicit Search

C1.3 Summary

Content of the Course



C1.1 The Big Three

Classical Planning Algorithms

Let's start solving planning tasks!

This Chapter and the Next

very high-level overview of classical planning algorithms

- **bird's eye view:** no details, just some very brief ideas

The Big Three

Of the many planning approaches, three techniques stand out:

- ▶ **explicit search** $\rightsquigarrow$ Chapters C3–C4, Parts D–G
- ▶ **SAT planning** $\rightsquigarrow$ Chapters C5–C6
- ▶ **symbolic search** $\rightsquigarrow$ Chapters C7–C8

also: many algorithm portfolios

Satisficing or Optimal Planning?

must carefully distinguish:

- ▶ **satisficing planning**: any plan is OK (cheaper ones preferred)
- ▶ **optimal planning**: plans must have minimum cost

solved by similar techniques, but:

- ▶ details **very different**
- ▶ almost **no overlap** between best techniques for satisficing planning and best techniques for optimal planning
- ▶ many tasks that are trivial for satisficing planners are impossibly hard for optimal planners

C1.2 Explicit Search

Explicit Search

You know this one already! (Hopefully.)

Reminder: State-Space Search

Need to Catch Up?

- ▶ We **assume prior knowledge** of basic search algorithms:
 - ▶ uninformed vs. informed (heuristic)
 - ▶ satisficing vs. optimal
 - ▶ heuristics and their properties
 - ▶ specific algorithms: e.g., breadth-first search, greedy best-first search, A^*
- ▶ If you are not familiar with them, we recommend Part B of the **Foundations of Artificial Intelligence** course:
<https://dmi.unibas.ch/en/studies/computer-science/course-offer-spring-2026/13548-lecture-foundations-of-artificial-intelligence/>

Reminder: Interface for Heuristic Search Algorithms

Abstract Interface Needed for Heuristic Search Algorithms

- ▶ `init()` $\rightsquigarrow$ returns initial state
- ▶ `is_goal(s)` $\rightsquigarrow$ tests if s is a goal state
- ▶ `succ(s)` $\rightsquigarrow$ returns all pairs $\langle a, s' \rangle$ with $s \xrightarrow{a} s'$
- ▶ `cost(a)` $\rightsquigarrow$ returns cost of action a
- ▶ `h(s)` $\rightsquigarrow$ returns heuristic value for state s

$\rightsquigarrow$ Foundations of Artificial Intelligence course, Chap. B2 and B9

State Space vs. Search Space

- ▶ Planning tasks induce transition systems (a.k.a. state spaces) with an initial state, labeled transitions and goal states.
- ▶ State-space search searches state spaces with an initial state, a successor function and goal states.
- ~> looks like an obvious correspondence
- ▶ However, in planning as search, the state space being searched **can be different** from the state space of the planning task.
- ▶ When we need to make a distinction, we speak of
 - ▶ the **state space** of the planning task whose states are called **world states** vs.
 - ▶ the **search space** of the search algorithm whose states are called **search states**.

Design Choice: Search Direction

How to apply explicit search to planning? $\rightsquigarrow$ many design choices!

Design Choice: Search Direction

- ▶ **progression**: forward from initial state to goal
- ▶ **regression**: backward from goal states to initial state
- ▶ **bidirectional search**

$\rightsquigarrow$ Chapters C3–C4

Design Choice: Search Algorithm

How to apply explicit search to planning? $\rightsquigarrow$ **many design choices!**

Design Choice: Search Algorithm

- ▶ **uninformed search:**
depth-first, breadth-first, iterative depth-first, ...
- ▶ **heuristic search (systematic):**
greedy best-first, A^* , weighted A^* , IDA*, ...
- ▶ **heuristic search (local):**
hill-climbing, simulated annealing, beam search, ...

Design Choice: Search Control

How to apply explicit search to planning? $\rightsquigarrow$ **many design choices!**

Design Choice: Search Control

- ▶ **heuristics** for informed search algorithms
- ▶ **pruning techniques**: invariants, symmetry elimination, partial-order reduction, helpful actions pruning, ...

How do we find good heuristics in a domain-independent way?

$\rightsquigarrow$ one of the main focus areas of classical planning research

$\rightsquigarrow$ **Parts D–G**

C1.3 Summary

Summary

(Joint summary follows after next chapter.)

Planning and Optimization

C2. Overview of Classical Planning Algorithms (Part 2)

Malte Helmert and Gabriele Röger

Universität Basel

October 5, 2026

Planning and Optimization

October 5, 2026 — C2. Overview of Classical Planning Algorithms (Part 2)

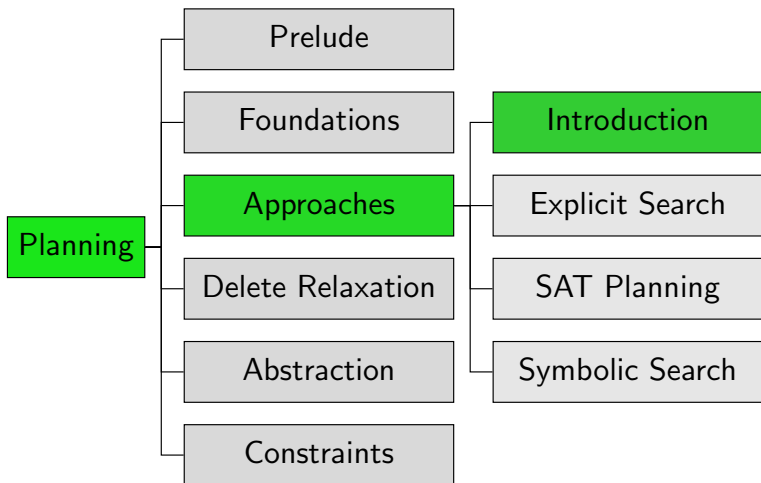
C2.1 SAT Planning

C2.2 Symbolic Search

C2.3 Planning System Examples

C2.4 Summary

Content of the Course



The Big Three (Repeated from Last Chapter)

Of the many planning approaches, three techniques stand out:

- ▶ **explicit search** $\rightsquigarrow$ Chapters C3–C4, Parts D–G
- ▶ **SAT planning** $\rightsquigarrow$ Chapters C5–C6
- ▶ **symbolic search** $\rightsquigarrow$ Chapters C7–C8

also: many algorithm portfolios

C2.1 SAT Planning

SAT Planning: Basic Idea

- ▶ formalize problem of finding plan **with a given horizon** (length bound) as a **propositional satisfiability problem** and feed it to a generic SAT solver
- ▶ to obtain a (semi-) complete algorithm, try with increasing horizons until a plan is found (= the formula is satisfiable)
- ▶ **important optimization:** allow applying several non-conflicting operators “at the same time” so that a shorter horizon suffices

SAT Encodings: Variables

- ▶ given propositional planning task $\langle V, I, O, \gamma \rangle$
- ▶ given **horizon** $T \in \mathbb{N}_0$

Variables of SAT Encoding

- ▶ propositional variables v^i for all $v \in V$, $0 \leq i \leq T$
encode **state after i steps** of the plan
- ▶ propositional variables o^i for all $o \in O$, $1 \leq i \leq T$
encode **operator(s) applied in i -th step** of the plan

Design Choice: SAT Encoding

Again, there are several important **design choices**.

Design Choice: SAT Encoding

- ▶ **sequential** or **parallel**
- ▶ many ways of modeling planning semantics in logic

↪ main focus of research on SAT planning

Design Choice: SAT Solver

Again, there are several important **design choices**.

Design Choice: SAT Solver

- ▶ **out-of-the-box** like Glucose, CaDiCal, MiniSAT
- ▶ planning-specific modifications

Design Choice: Evaluation Strategy

Again, there are several important **design choices**.

Design Choice: Evaluation Strategy

- ▶ always advance horizon by +1 or more aggressively
- ▶ possibly probe multiple horizons concurrently

C2.2 Symbolic Search

Symbolic Search Planning: Basic Ideas

- ▶ search works on **sets of states** at a time
- ▶ operators, goal states, state sets reachable with a given cost etc. represented by **binary decision diagrams (BDDs)** (or similar data structures)
- ▶ **hope**: exponentially large state sets can be represented as polynomially sized BDDs, which can be efficiently processed
- ▶ perform **symbolic breadth-first search** (or something more sophisticated) on these set representations

Symbolic Breadth-First Progression Search

prototypical algorithm:

Symbolic Breadth-First Progression Search

```
def bfs-progression( $V, I, O, \gamma$ ):  
     $goal\_states := models(\gamma)$   
     $reached_0 := \{I\}$   
     $i := 0$   
    loop:  
        if  $reached_i \cap goal\_states \neq \emptyset$ :  
            return solution found  
         $reached_{i+1} := reached_i \cup apply(reached_i, O)$   
        if  $reached_{i+1} = reached_i$ :  
            return no solution exists  
         $i := i + 1$ 
```

$\leadsto$ If we can implement operations *models*, $\{I\}$, $\cap$, $\neq \emptyset$, $\cup$, *apply* and $=$ efficiently, this is a reasonable algorithm.

Design Choice: Symbolic Data Structure

Again, there are several important **design choices**.

Design Choice: Symbolic Data Structure

- ▶ **BDDs**
- ▶ ADDs
- ▶ EVMDDs
- ▶ SDDs

Other Design Choices

- ▶ additionally, same design choices as for explicit search:
 - ▶ search direction
 - ▶ search algorithm
 - ▶ search control (incl. heuristics)
- ▶ in practice, hard to make heuristics and other advanced search control efficient for symbolic search
 ~> rarely used

C2.3 Planning System Examples

Planning Systems: FF

FF (Hoffmann & Nebel, 2001)

- ▶ problem class: satisficing
- ▶ algorithm class: explicit search
- ▶ search direction: forward search
- ▶ search algorithm: enforced hill-climbing
- ▶ heuristic: FF heuristic (inadmissible)
- ▶ other aspects: helpful action pruning; goal agenda manager

↪ breakthrough for heuristic search planning;
winner of IPC 2000

Planning Systems: LAMA

LAMA (Richter & Westphal, 2008)

- ▶ **problem class:** satisficing
- ▶ **algorithm class:** explicit search
- ▶ **search direction:** forward search
- ▶ **search algorithm:** restarting Weighted A* (anytime)
- ▶ **heuristic:** FF heuristic and landmark heuristic (inadmissible)
- ▶ **other aspects:** preferred operators; deferred heuristic evaluation; multi-queue search

↪ still one of the leading satisficing planners;
winner of IPC 2008 and IPC 2011 (satisficing tracks)

Planning Systems: Madagascar-pC

Madagascar (Rintanen, 2014)

- ▶ problem class: satisficing
- ▶ algorithm class: SAT planning
- ▶ encoding: parallel $\exists$ -step encoding
- ▶ SAT solver: using planning-specific action variable selection
- ▶ evaluation strategy: exponential horizons, parallelized probing
- ▶ other aspects: invariants

↪ second place at IPC 2014 (agile track)

Planning Systems: SymBA*

SymBA* (Torralba, 2015)

- ▶ problem class: optimal
- ▶ algorithm class: symbolic search
- ▶ symbolic data structure: BDDs
- ▶ search direction: bidirectional
- ▶ search algorithm: mixture of (symbolic) Dijkstra and A*
- ▶ heuristic: perimeter abstractions/blind

↪ winner of IPC 2014 (optimal track)

Planning Systems: Scorpion

Scorpion 2023 (Seipp, 2023)

- ▶ problem class: optimal
- ▶ algorithm class: explicit search
- ▶ search direction: forward search
- ▶ search algorithm: A^*
- ▶ heuristic: abstraction heuristics and cost partitioning

↪ runner-up of IPC 2023 (optimal track)

Planning Systems: Fast Downward Stone Soup

Fast Downward Stone Soup 2023, optimal version
(Büchner et al., 2023)

- ▶ problem class: optimal
- ▶ algorithm class: (portfolio of) explicit search
- ▶ search direction: forward search
- ▶ search algorithm: A^*
- ▶ heuristic: all admissible heuristics considered in the course

~> winner of IPC 2011 (optimal track);
various awards in IPC 2011–2023

Planning Systems: SymK

SymK (Speck et al., 2025)

- ▶ problem class: optimal
- ▶ algorithm class: symbolic search
- ▶ symbolic data structure: BDDs
- ▶ search direction: bidirectional
- ▶ search algorithm: symbolic Dijkstra algorithm
- ▶ heuristic: blind

C2.4 Summary

Summary

big three classes of algorithms for classical planning:

- ▶ **explicit search**
 - ▶ **design choices:** search direction, search algorithm, search control (incl. heuristics)
- ▶ **SAT planning**
 - ▶ **design choices:** SAT encoding, SAT solver, evaluation strategy
- ▶ **symbolic search**
 - ▶ **design choices:** symbolic data structure
+ same ones as for explicit search