Solutions to Test 2, Theory of Computation, Spring 2026

Problem 1. Prove that it is not possible, given a program that always halts, to check whether this program always computes $2^n \,\%\, n$. *Comment:* here, as usual, $a \,\%\, b$ means remainder.

Solution. We will prove that if such a checker exists, then we can construct a zero-checker – and we already know that zero-checkers are not possible. Indeed, let us assume that we have an algorithm *checker*(p) that, given a program p that always halts, checked whether $\forall n\,(p(n) = 2^n \,\%\, n)$. Suppose that we have a program q that always halts and we want to check whether this program q always returns 0. To check this, we form the following auxiliary program that always returns $q(n) + 2^n \,\%\, n$:

```
public static int aux(int n)
  {return q(n) + Math.pow(2,n) % n;}
```

The value $q(n) + 2^n \,\%\, n$ is always equal to $2^n \,\%\, n$ if and only if the value $q(n)$ is always equal to 0.

Thus, the algorithm *checker*$(q(n)+2^n \,\%\, n)$ that applies *checker* to the above auxiliary program is a zero-checker. However, we have proven that zero-checkers do not exist. This contradiction shows that our assumption – that the desired checkers are possible – leads to a contradiction. Thus, such checkers are not possible. The result is proven.

Problem 2. Design a Turing machine that computes $n - 4$ in binary code for all $n \geq 4$. Trace this machine on the example of $n = 1101_2$.

Solution. When we add $4_{10} = 100_2$ to a binary number, the last two bits of 100_2 are 0s, so the last two bits of the sum do not change; for other bits, we have the same algorithm as for computing $n - 1$. Here is the resulting algorithm:

- we skip the last two bits,
- after that, if we see 0, we replace this 0 with 1;
- if we see 1, we replace it with 0 and start going back.

Here are the corresponding Turing machine rules:

- start, – → R, skip1st
- skip1st, 1 → R, skip2nd
- skip1st, 0 → R, skip2nd
- skip2nd, 1 → R, moving
- skip2nd, 0 → R, moving
- moving, 0 → 1, R
- moving, 1 → 0, L, back
- back, 0 → L
- back, 1 → L
- back, – → halt

Here is a tracing on the example of 1101 − 100:

$\underline{-}$	1	0	1	1	–	...	start
–	$\underline{1}$	0	1	1	–	...	skip1st
–	1	$\underline{0}$	1	1	–	...	skip2nd
–	1	0	$\underline{1}$	1	–	...	moving
–	1	$\underline{0}$	0	1	–	...	back
–	$\underline{1}$	0	0	1	–	...	back
$\underline{-}$	1	0	0	1	–	...	back
$\underline{-}$	1	0	0	1	–	...	halt

Problem 3. Use a general algorithm for a Turing machine that represents composition to transform your design from Problem 2 into a Turing machine for computing $f(f(n)) = n - 8$.

Solution.

- start, – → R, skip1st1
- skip1st1, 1 → R, skip2nd1
- skip1st1, 0 → R, skip2nd1
- skip2nd1, 1 → R, moving1
- skip2nd1, 0 → R, moving1
- moving1, 0 → 1, R
- moving1, 1 → 0, L, back1
- back1, 0 → L
- back1, 1 → L
- back1, – → start2
- start2, – → R, skip1st2
- skip1st2, 1 → R, skip2nd2
- skip1st2, 0 → R, skip2nd2
- skip2nd2, 1 → R, moving2
- skip2nd2, 0 → R, moving2
- moving2, 0 → 1, R
- moving2, 1 → 0, L, back2
- back2, 0 → L
- back2, 1 → L
- back2, – → halt

Problem 4. Give a formal definition of feasibility and explain what is practically feasible. Give two examples:

- an example when an algorithm is feasible in the sense of the formal definition but not practically feasible, and
- an example when an algorithm is practically feasible, but not feasible according to the formal definition.

These examples must be different from the examples that we had in class, in posted lectures, homeworks, or in last years' solutions.

Solution. An algorithm A is feasible if there exists a polynomial $P(n)$ such that for each input x of size $\text{len}(x) = n$, the computation time $t_A(x)$ is smaller than or equal to $P(n)$:

$$t_A(x) \le P(\text{len}(x)).$$

An algorithm is practically feasible if for every input of reasonable length, this algorithm finishes computations in reasonable time.

Examples:

- an example when an algorithm is formally feasible, but not practically feasible: $t_A^w(n) = 10^{2025}$;
- an example when an algorithm is practically feasible but not formally feasible: $t_A^w(n) = \exp(10^{-2025} \cdot n)$.

Here are the explanations for both examples.

First example: $t_A(x) = 10^{2026}$. This is a constant – so it is feasible in the sense of the formal definition. On the other hand, in class, we learned that:

- even if we have as many computational devices as physically possible – i.e., if every single elementary particle – and there are 10^{90} of them – serves as a computational,
- and even if each of these computational devices performs one computational steps during each shortest possible periods of time – and there are about 10^{40} of them during the lifetime of the Universe,

then overall, we can perform no more than $10^{90} \cdot 10^{40} = 10^{130}$ computational steps, and 10^{2024} is larger than 10^{130}.

Second example: $t_A(x) = \exp\left(10^{-2026} \cdot \text{len}(x)\right)$. This function is exponentially growing – thus, not feasible in the sense of the formal definition, since every exponential function grows faster than a polynomial.

However, in practice, the length of the input cannot be larger than the length that would get if we combine all the knowledge that we have in the world – which would be approximately $\text{len}(x) = 10^{20}$ bits. Even for this huge number of bits, this algorithm would require

$$t_A(x) = \exp\left(10^{-2026} \cdot 10^{20}\right) = \exp\left(10^{-2006}\right)$$

computational steps. Since 10^{-2006} is smaller than 1 and $\exp(x) = e^x$ is an increasing function, we conclude that

$$t_A(x) = \exp\left(10^{-2006}\right) \leq \exp(1) = 2.7128\ldots,$$

i.e., this algorithm would require 1 or 2 steps, which is clearly feasible. If the input is shorter than 10^{20} bits, we will need even fewer computational steps.

Problem 5. What is P? NP? NP-hard? NP-complete? Brief definitions are OK. What do we gain and what do we lose when we prove that a problem is NP-complete? Explain one negative consequence (what we cannot do) and one positive one (what we can do).

Solution.

- P is the class of all the problems that can be solved in polynomial (= feasible) time.
- NP is the class of all the problems for which, once you have a candidate for a solution, you can check, in polynomial time, whether this candidate is indeed a solution.
- A problem from the class NP is called NP-complete if every problem from the class NP can be reduced to this problem.
- A problem is called NP-hard if every problem from the class NP can be reduced to this problem. *Comment:* the difference from NP-completeness is that an NP-hard problem may not be from the class NP.

What do we gain and what do we lose when we prove that a problem is NP-complete? A positive consequence is that if we have a good algorithm for solving some cases of the problem, then we automatically get good algorithms for all other problems from the class NP – and many good algorithms have been obtained this way. A negative consequence is that, unless it turns out that P = NP, we cannot have a feasible algorithm for solving all particular cases of this problem.

Problem 6. What is propositional satisfiability? Give an example. Explain why this problem is important in software testing.

Solution. Propositional satisfiability:

- *given:* a propositional formula, i.e., any expression obtained from Boolean variables by using "and" (&& in Java), "or" (|| in Java), and "not" (! in Java) – e.g., !(a || !b) && (!a || b);
- *find:* the values of the Boolean variables that make the given formula true.

Why is this problem important? Because when we test a program with branching, we need to make sure that we have tested both branches. For this purpose, we need to find the values of the variables for which the corresponding condition is true. This is exactly what propositional satisfiability is about.