Simplifying Failure-Inducing Input

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The Mozilla BugATHon

Mozilla—Netscape’s open source web browser project
Maintained by dozens of Netscape engineers and 100s of volunteers
In February 2000: ~5,500 open bugs in the Bugzilla database

Mozilla BugATHon—call for volunteers who would simplify test cases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pledge Level</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 bugs</td>
<td>invitation to the Gecko launch party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 bugs</td>
<td>the invitation, plus an attractive Gecko stuffed animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 bugs</td>
<td>same, but animal autographed by the Father of Gecko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 bugs</td>
<td>the invitation, plus a Gecko T-shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 bugs</td>
<td>same, but T-shirt signed by the grateful engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 bugs</td>
<td>same, but T-shirt signed by the whole raptor team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Failure-Inducing Circumstances

Which of the circumstances $c_i$ are the causes for $\gamma$?
Differing Circumstances

Assumption—two program runs under differing circumstances:

- one passes the test (✔)―e.g. on some trivial or empty input
- the other one fails (✘)―the one we’re interested in

Assumption: a gradual *transition* between these two runs.

We denote the *differences* between these program runs by a *set of changes* \( C = \{\Delta_1, \ldots, \Delta_n\} \)—i.e. changes applied to the circumstances.

A \( \Delta_i \) can stand for:

- the insertion of a single character
- the deletion of a line
- the insertion of a substructure...
Tests

A test case is a subset of changes $c \subseteq C$.

Let $test : 2^C \to \{\checkmark, \times, ?\}$ be a function which checks a test case.

Three possible outcomes:

- The test passes ($\checkmark$)
- The test fails ($\times$)
- The test outcome is unresolved ($?$)

Axioms:

\[
\begin{align*}
test(\emptyset) &= \checkmark \quad ("cause absent, effect absent") \\
test(C) &= \times \quad ("cause present, effect present")
\end{align*}
\]


**Minimal Test Cases**

Our goal: a *minimal test case* $c \subseteq C$

If $c$ is *minimal*, the failure does not occur in any subset:

$$\forall c' \subset c \ (test(c') \neq \times)$$

Problem: One must test all $2^{|c|} - 1$ subsets of $c$.

Pragmatic approach: a *1-minimal* test case

No single $\Delta_i$ can be omitted without causing the failure to disappear:

$$\forall c' \subset c \ (|c| - |c'| \leq 1 \Rightarrow (test(c') \neq \times))$$

“*If you remove any more characters from the file of the simplified test case, you no longer see the bug.*” (Mozilla BugATHon)
A Minimizing Algorithm

Basic pattern: Start by removing large chunks, try smaller ones later . . .

. . . until the automated test fails—and then repeat with smaller subset.

- Guarantees 1-minimality (every subset will eventually be tested)
- Best efficiency for small failure-inducing input
A Minimizing Algorithm (2)

The minimizing delta debugging algorithm $\text{ddmin}(c)$ is

$$\text{ddmin}(c) = \text{ddmin}_2(c, 2) \quad \text{where}$$

$$\text{ddmin}_2(c, n) = \begin{cases} 
\text{ddmin}_2(c_i, 2) & \text{if } \exists i \cdot \text{test}(c_i) = \times \\
\text{ddmin}_2(c - c_i, \max(n - 1, 2)) & \text{if } \exists i \cdot \text{test}(c - c_i) = \times \\
\text{ddmin}_2(c, \min(|c|, 2n)) & \text{if } n < |c| \\
c & \text{otherwise}
\end{cases}$$

where $c = \bigcup c_i$ with $c_i$ pairwise disjoint and $\forall c_i \cdot (|c_i| \approx |c|/n)$.

Number of tests: $|c|^2 + 3|c|$ in worst case, $\log_2 |c|$ in best case.
Example: GCC Dumps Core

```c
#define SIZE 20
double mult(double z[], int n)
{
    int i, j;
    i = 0;
    for (j = 0; j < n; j++) {
        i = i + j + 1;
        z[i] = z[i] * (z[0] + 1.0);
    }
    return z[n];
}

void copy(double to[],
          double from[], int count)
{
    int n = (count + 7) / 8;
    switch (count % 8) do {
        case 0: *to++ = *from++;
        case 7: *to++ = *from++;
        case 6: *to++ = *from++;
        case 5: *to++ = *from++;
        case 4: *to++ = *from++;
        case 3: *to++ = *from++;
        case 2: *to++ = *from++;
        case 1: *to++ = *from++;
    } while (--n > 0);
    return mult(to, 2);
}

int main(int argc, char *argv[])
{
    double x[SIZE], y[SIZE];
    double *px = x;
    while (px < x + SIZE)
        *px++ = (px - x) * (SIZE + 1.0);
    return copy(y, x, SIZE);
}
```

```
linux$ (ulimit -H -s 256; gcc -O bug.c)
gcc: Internal compiler error: program cc1 got fatal signal 11
```
**Example: GCC Dumps Core (2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Test case</th>
<th>test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>#define SIZE 20\n double mult(double z[],int n) { ... }</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>#define SIZE 20\n</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>double mult(double z[],int n) { ... }</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>double mult(double z[],int n) { int i, j; i = 0; }</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>double mult(double z[],int n) { for(j = 0; j &lt; n; j++) { ... } ... }</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Minimal input found after 857 tests:

```
t(double z[],int n){int i,j;for(;;){i = i + 1;z[i] = z[i] * (z[0] + 0);}return z[n];}
```
Example: Minimizing Fuzz

Classical experiment: UNIX tools fed with fuzz input (10,000 random characters). Most crash.

Minimizing input reveals causes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Minimized Input</th>
<th>test runs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>flex – lexical analyzer</td>
<td>⟨2121 characters⟩</td>
<td>11589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ul – do underlining</td>
<td>⟨516 characters⟩</td>
<td>3055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nroff – format documents</td>
<td>&quot;\302\n&quot;</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plot – graphics filter</td>
<td>&quot;f&quot;</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Tests carried out on a Sun Solaris 2.6 machine)
Example: Mozilla Cannot Print

Mozilla bug #24735, reported by anantk@yahoo.com:

  Ok the following operations cause mozilla to crash consistently on my machine
  -> Start mozilla
  -> Go to bugzilla.mozilla.org
  -> Select search for bug
  -> Print to file setting the bottom and right margins to .50 (I use the file /var/tmp/netscape.ps)
  -> Once it’s done printing do the exact same thing again on the same file (/var/tmp/netscape.ps)
  -> This causes the browser to crash with a segfault
Mozilla Cannot Print—Minimizing User Actions

X11 Capture/Replay tool recorded 95 user actions (mouse motions, key presses, etc.)

Delta Debugging simplified these user actions to 3 relevant ones (82 test runs / 21 minutes):

1. Press the P key while the Alt key is held. (Invoke the Print dialog.)
2. Press mouse button 1 on the Print button (Arm the Print button.)
3. Release mouse button 1. (Start printing.)

Everything else is irrelevant—including releasing the P key.
Mozilla Cannot Print—Minimizing HTML

The original Search for bug page has a length of 896 lines.
Delta Debugging simplified this page to a single line (57 test runs):

```
<SELECT NAME="priority" MULTIPLE SIZE=7>
```

Minimization by characters minimized the line even further.

New, simplified bug report:

-> Create a HTML page containing `<SELECT>`

-> Load the page and print it using Alt+P and Print.

-> The browser crashes with a segmentation fault.
**Future Work: Integrating Analysis**

Basic idea: reduce large number of tests by additional knowledge

**Structure knowledge** can be a big help in decomposing input:

- Decompose GCC input according to C syntax
- Decompose TROFF input by lines
- Decompose HTML input according to HTML syntax...

**Relating the input to the output** (by means of program analysis) helps in finding good candidates for causality.
Future Work: Alternate Circumstances

Besides program input, one may consider alternate circumstances that affect program execution:

- Changes to the program code (Zeller 1999)
- Executed functions
- Performed schedules
- Taken branches...

Delta debugging can separate all these into relevant and irrelevant circumstances—hopefully with the help of program analysis.
Future Work: Open Issues

When is a run considered a failure?

- Too few details ⇒ more false positives
- Too many details ⇒ larger number of circumstances
Future Work: Open Issues (2)

Delta debugging minimizes problems of the kind

$$\Delta_1 \land \Delta_2 \land \cdots \land \Delta_n \Leftrightarrow y$$

But problems may also look like

$$\Delta_i \lor \Delta_j \Leftrightarrow y \quad \text{or} \quad \neg \Delta_i \Leftrightarrow y \quad \text{or} \ldots$$

The “simplest” causality is in fact the shortest algorithm $f$ that computes $y = f(\Delta_1, \ldots, \Delta_n)$
Causes and Events

The *cause* of any event is a preceding event without which the event in question would not have occurred.

How to demonstrate causality? John Stuart Mill (1806–1873):

- **Method of agreement**—Effect present when cause present
- **Method of difference**—Effect absent when cause absent
- **Method of concomitant variation**—Both agreement and difference (stronger)

Causality cannot be demonstrated without experimentation!
Causality is the Key

Example program:

```c
a = b;
printf("a = \%d\n", a);
```

Output:

```
a = 0
```

What does this say about $b$?
float a;
Conclusion

Delta debugging...

- automatically simplifies failure-inducing circumstances
- proves causality by experimentation
- requires large number of tests (but analysis can help!)

http://www.fmi.uni-passau.de/st/dd/