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# What's in a bit

# Talk overview

- The basics
- Step 1: Designing a binary file format
- Step 2: Reverse engineering binary files

# Talk overview

- **The basics**
- Step 1: Designing a binary file format
- Step 2: Reverse engineering binary files

0110

01101100

01101100

%

01101100

108

01101100

6.75



01101100

112

01101100

160kbit/s, 44.1Khz

01101100

|

Binary data has no inherent meaning

All forms of meaning are  
***conventions*** and ***agreements***

# Conventions

- Numbers are like decimal numbers

- $108_{10} == 1 * 10^2 + 0 * 10^1 + 8 * 10^0$   
 $== 1 * 100 + 0 * 10 + 8$

- $01101100_2 == 1*2^6 + 1*2^5 + 0*2^4 + 1*2^3 + 1*2^2 + 0*2^1 + 0*2^0$   
 $== 2^6 + 2^5 + 2^3 + 2^2$   
 $== 64_{10} + 32_{10} + 8_{10} + 4_{10}$   
 $== 108_{10}$

# Conventions

- What about negative numbers?
  - Sign-magnitude
  - One's complement
  - Two's complement
    - Definite choice by all current computers

# Conventions

- If the first bit is set, we consider it to represent a negative number
- Just keep subtracting as if it were a regular number

# Conventions

0111 == 7

0110 == 6

0101 == 5

0100 == 4

0011 == 3

0010 == 2

0001 == 1

0000 == 0

1111 == 15

1110 == 14

1101 == 13

1100 == 12

1011 == 11

1010 == 10

1001 == 9

1000 == 8



# Conventions

0111 == 7

0110 == 6

0101 == 5

0100 == 4

0011 == 3

0010 == 2

0001 == 1

0000 == 0

1111 == -1

1110 == -2

1101 == -3

1100 == -4

1011 == -5

1010 == -6

1001 == -7

1000 == -8

# Conventions

$$0011 == 3$$

$$0010 == 2$$

$$0001 == 1$$

$$0000 == 0$$

$$1111 == -1$$

$$1110 == -2$$

$$1101 == -3$$

$$1100 == -4$$

- $3_{10} + -3_{10} == 0_{10}$

- $$\begin{array}{r} 0011 \quad (== 3) \\ \underline{1101} + (== -3) \\ (1)0000 \quad (== 0) \end{array}$$

# Conventions

- Decimals?

- “Binaries”!

- $6.75_{10}$        $6 * 10^0 + 7 * 10^{-1} + 5 * 10^{-2}$

- $0110.1100_2$        $2^2 + 2^1 + 2^{-1} + 2^{-2}$

$$4 + 2 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4}$$

$$6 \frac{3}{4}$$

# Conventions

- Text data is a sequence of identical sized “units”
- Each “unit” represents one letter or action
  - EBCDIC
  - ASCII
  - Unicode UTF-16

# Conventions

0100100001100101011011000110110001101111

Hello

# Conventions

01001000

01100101

01101100

01101100

01101111

# Conventions

01001000

Letter, upper case, 8<sup>th</sup>

01100101

Letter, lower case, 5<sup>th</sup>

01101100

Letter, lower case, 12<sup>th</sup>

01101100

Letter, lower case, 12<sup>th</sup>

01101111

Letter, lower case, 15<sup>th</sup>

# Conventions

01001000

Letter, upper case, 8<sup>th</sup> == H

01100101

Letter, lower case, 5<sup>th</sup> == e

01101100

Letter, lower case, 12<sup>th</sup> == l

01101100

Letter, lower case, 12<sup>th</sup> == l

01101111

Letter, lower case, 15<sup>th</sup> == o



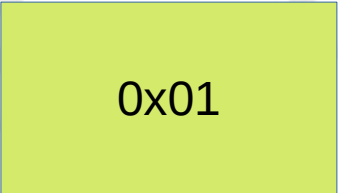
# Bigger numbers, use multiple bytes

- Little endian
  - Start from the little end
- 0000000110100100
- 10100100 00000001
- Use a library to read/write the appropriate variant
- Big endian
  - Start from the big end
- 0000000110100100
- 00000001 10100100
- C++20: `std::endian`

# What **else** can you do with 8 bits?

- Index into lookup table with up to 256 entries
- Variable-length encodings
- Run-length encoding
- Backreferences


# Variable length encoding



0x01

The value 1 in a variable-length encoding (Protobuf style)

# Variable length encoding

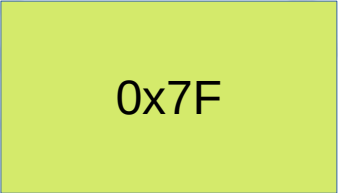


0x02

The value 2 in a variable-length encoding (Protobuf style)

If the top bit is not set, nothing special happens

# Variable length encoding



0x7F

The value 127 in a variable-length encoding (Protobuf style)

# Variable length encoding



The value 128 in a variable-length encoding (Protobuf style)

Every time the top bit is set, we pull in one extra byte

# Variable length encoding



100000000 ↔ 000000001

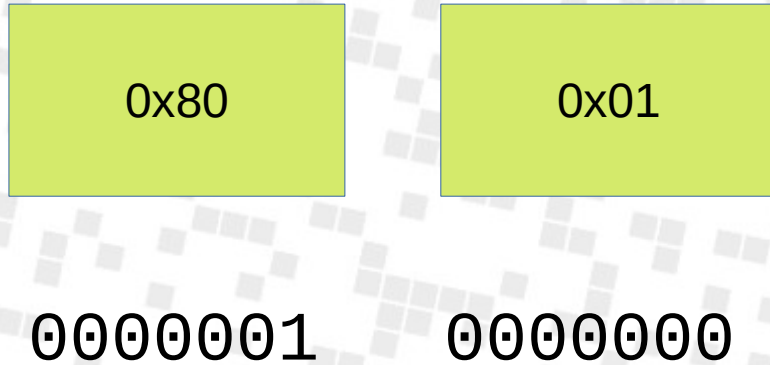
# Variable length encoding



00000001 ↔ 10000000



# Variable length encoding



# Variable length encoding



00 0000 1000 0000

# Variable length encoding

0x80

0x01

00 0000 1000 0000

( = 128 )

# Variable length encoding

0xAC

0x9E

0x04

1010 1100 1001 1110 0000 0100

0000 0100 1001 1110 1010 1100

000 0100 001 1110 010 1100 == 69420



# Protobuf in detail

- Expanding encoding for values
- Serialized structs
- Each field in the struct is serialized individually
  - First value identifies encoding method and field index number
  - For encoding 2, second value identifies length

# Protobuf in detail

```
message Person {  
  optional string name = 1;  
  optional int32 id = 2;  
  optional string email = 3;  
}
```

# Protobuf in detail

```
0A 05 50 65 74 65 72 10 2A 1A 11 64  
61 73 63 61 6E 64 78 40 67 6D 61 69  
6B 2E 63 6F 6D
```

# Protobuf in detail

0A 05 50 65 74 65 72

10 2A

1A 11 64 61 73 63 61 6E 64 78 40 67

6D 61 69 6B 2E 63 6F 6D



# Protobuf in detail

0A 05 50 65 74 65 72

0000 1/010 Field 1, encoding 2 == length/data

10 2A

0001 0/000 Field 2, encoding 0 == var-length integer

1A 11 64 61 73 63 61 6E 64 78 40 67 6D 61 69 6B 2E 63  
6F 6D

0001 1/010 Field 3, encoding 2 == length/data

# General purpose compression

- Pure random input: Impossible
- Actual data: very doable
- Base idea: Predict what comes next and only write it down if it is not that.

# Let's try it

Four score and seven years ago

I have a dream

Once upon a time

Tom and Jerry

Game Over

Supercali fragilisticexpialidocious

# Compression

Shannon entropy

- Numbers:  $2\log(\text{range})$  bits
- English text:  $\sim 2.6$  bits per character

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shannon%27s\\_source\\_coding\\_theorem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shannon%27s_source_coding_theorem)

[https://www.princeton.edu/~wbialek/rome/refs/shannon\\_51.pdf](https://www.princeton.edu/~wbialek/rome/refs/shannon_51.pdf)

# Compression

Kolmogorov complexity

- Same concept from the other direction
- Smallest possible representation of a given amount of data

# General compression techniques

- Dictionary building (LZ78, LZW)
- Run-length encoding
- Backreference encoding (LZ77, zlib, gzip, deflate)
  - Can do everything RLE can do, but better
- Data transforms
  - Do not compress, but leave data in more compressible form
- Variable-length codes (Huffman, Arithmetic, Range)

# Run-length encoding

|||

||||

|||| |

|||| ||| ||| |||

|||| ||| ||| |||

|||| ||| ||| |||

|||| ||| ||| |||

- 3
- 4
- 11
- 80
  
- 6243 ?

# Run-length encoding



Photo by [Doug Maloney](#)  
@ Unsplash



# Backreference encoding

Baba yetu, yetu uliye

Mbinguni yetu, yetu, amina

Baba yetu, yetu, uliye

Jina lako litukuzwe

Baba yetu, yetu uliye

Mbinguni yetu, yetu, amina

Baba yetu, yetu, uliye

Jina lako litukuzwe

Utupe leo chakula chetu

Tunachohitaji utusamehe

Makosa yetu, hey

Kama nasi tunavyowasamehe

Waliotukosea, usitutie

Katika majaribu, lakini

Utuokoe, na yule, milele na milele

Baba yetu, yetu uliye

Mbinguni yetu, yetu, amina

# Backreference encoding

Baba yetu, yetu uliye

Mbinguni yetu, yetu, amina

Baba yetu, yetu, uliye

Jina lako litukuzwe

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# Backreference encoding

Baba yetu, yetu uliye

Mbinguni yetu, yetu, amina

Baba yetu, yetu, uliye

Jina lako litukuzwe

Copy 91 characters from 91 back

Utupe leo chakula chetu

Tunachohitaji utusamehe

Makosa yetu, hey

Kama nasi tunavyowasamehe

Waliotukosea, usitutie

Katika majaribu, lakini

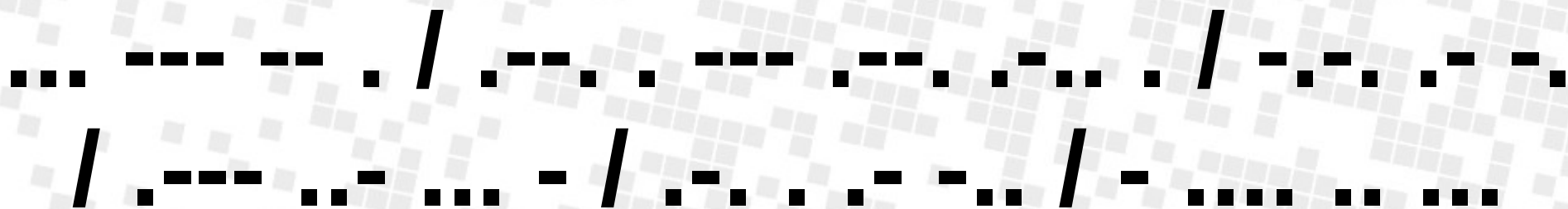
Utuokoe, na yule, milele na milele

Copy 91 characters from 281 back

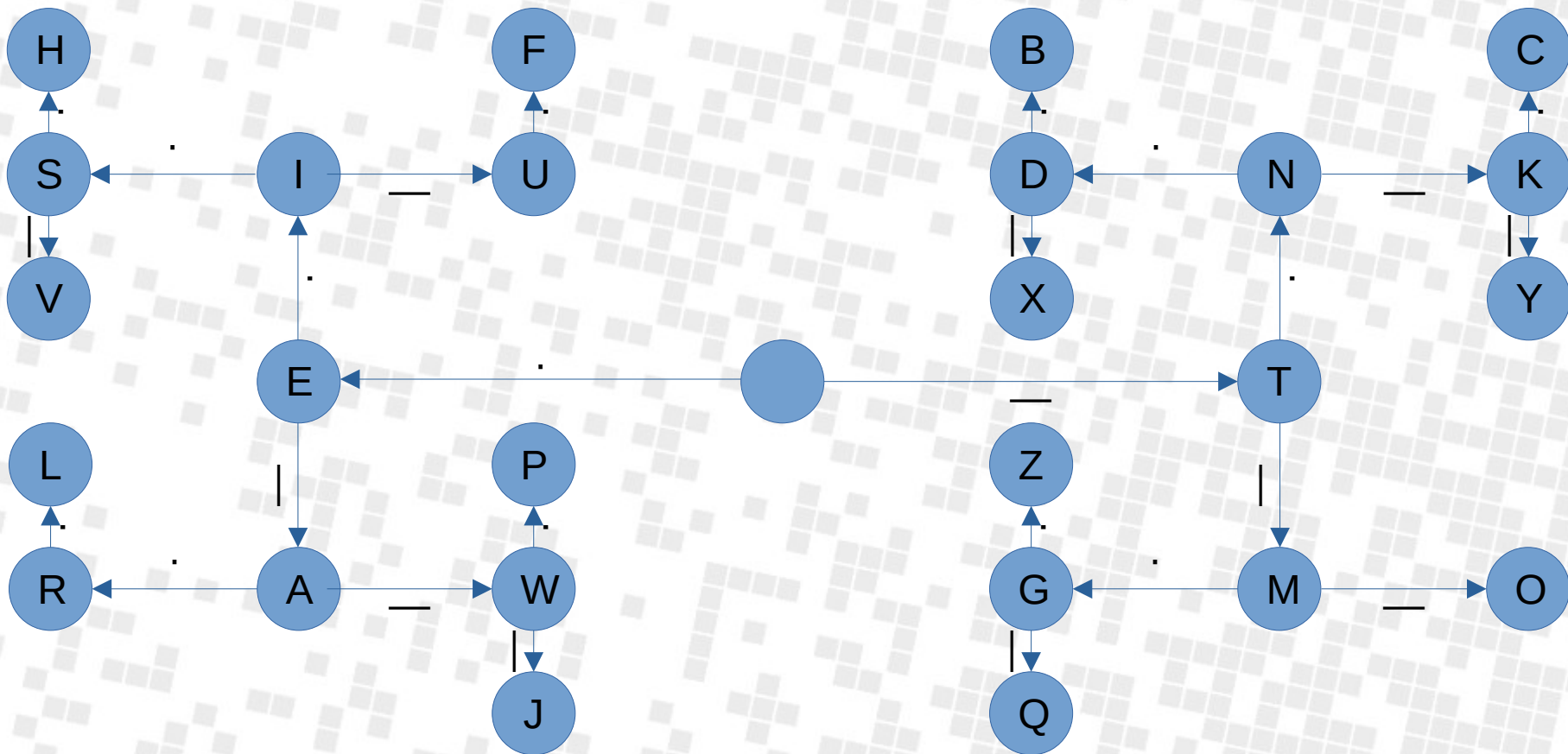
# Data transforms

- Use prior knowledge you have to increase predictability of your data
  - Array of Structs to Struct of Arrays
  - Sorting data
  - Delta coding (png)
  - Move-To-Front coding (bzip2)

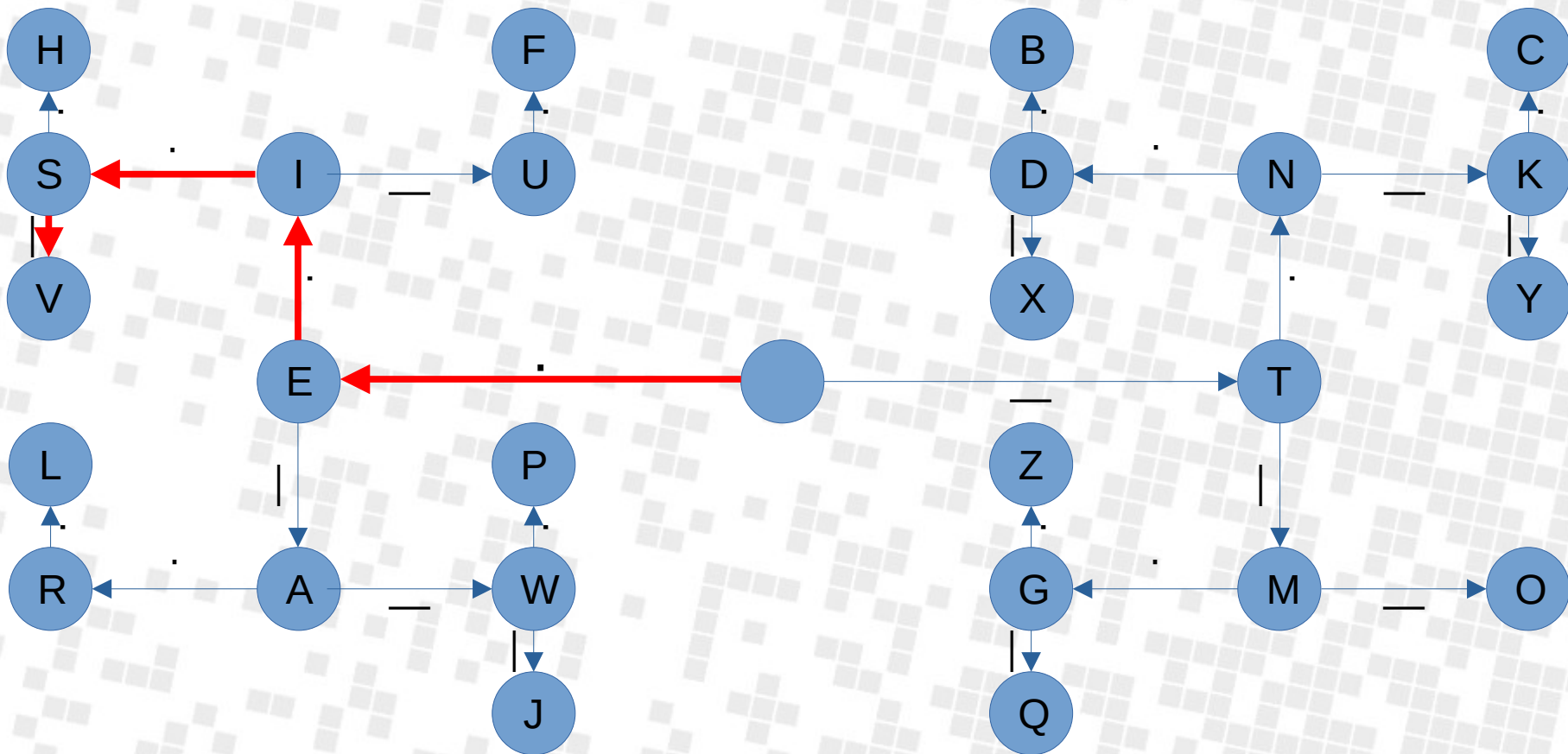
# Variable-length codes



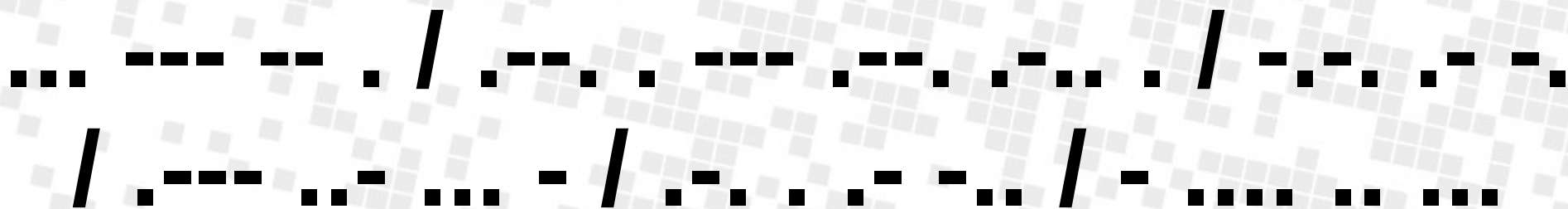
# Variable-length codes



# Variable-length codes



# Variable-length codes



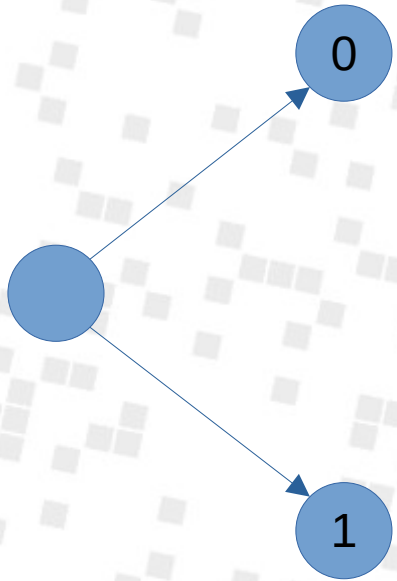


# Bit-packing

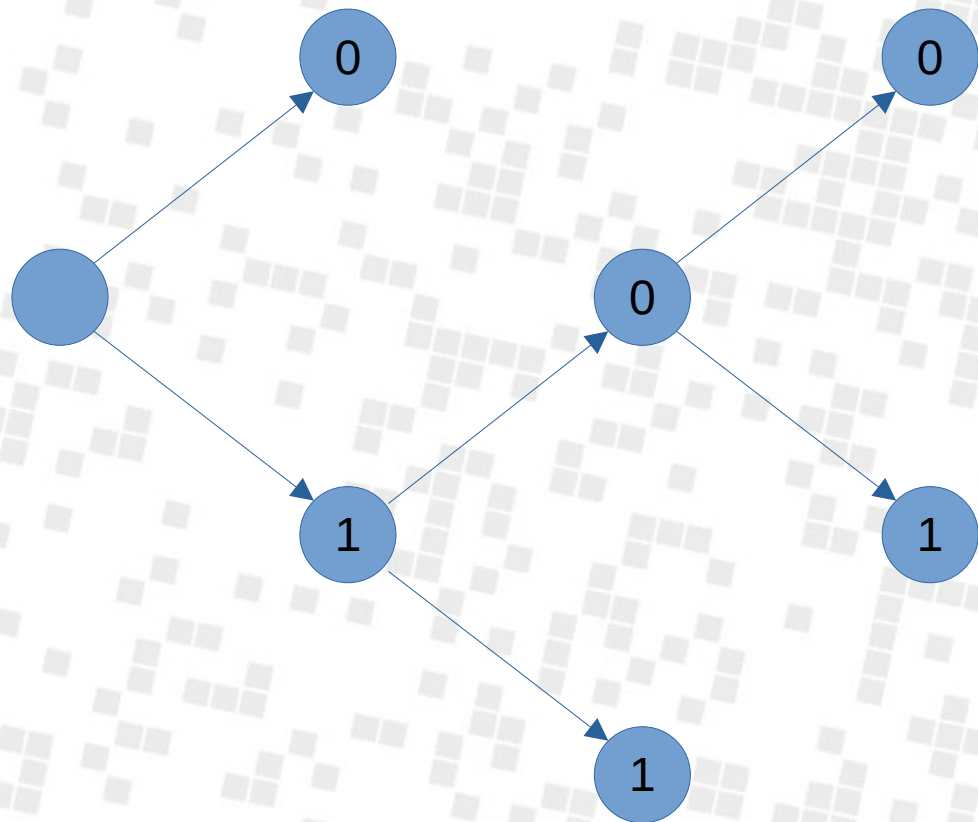
- Instead of assuming bytes or larger units, we represent information with parts of a byte
- Shorter values for more likely things, longer values for less likely things

# Variable-length codes

0: Option 1  
1: Option 2



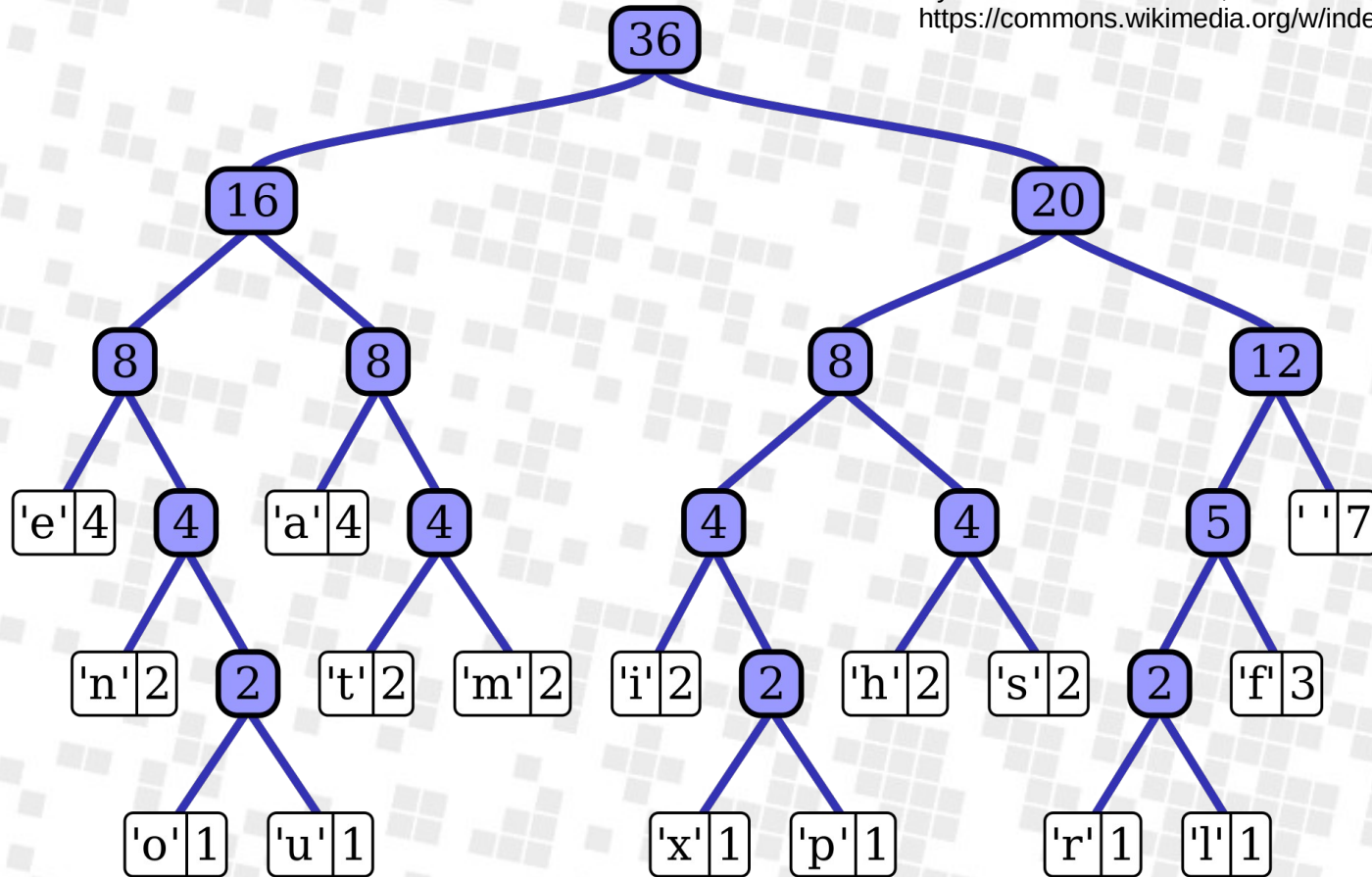
# Variable-length codes



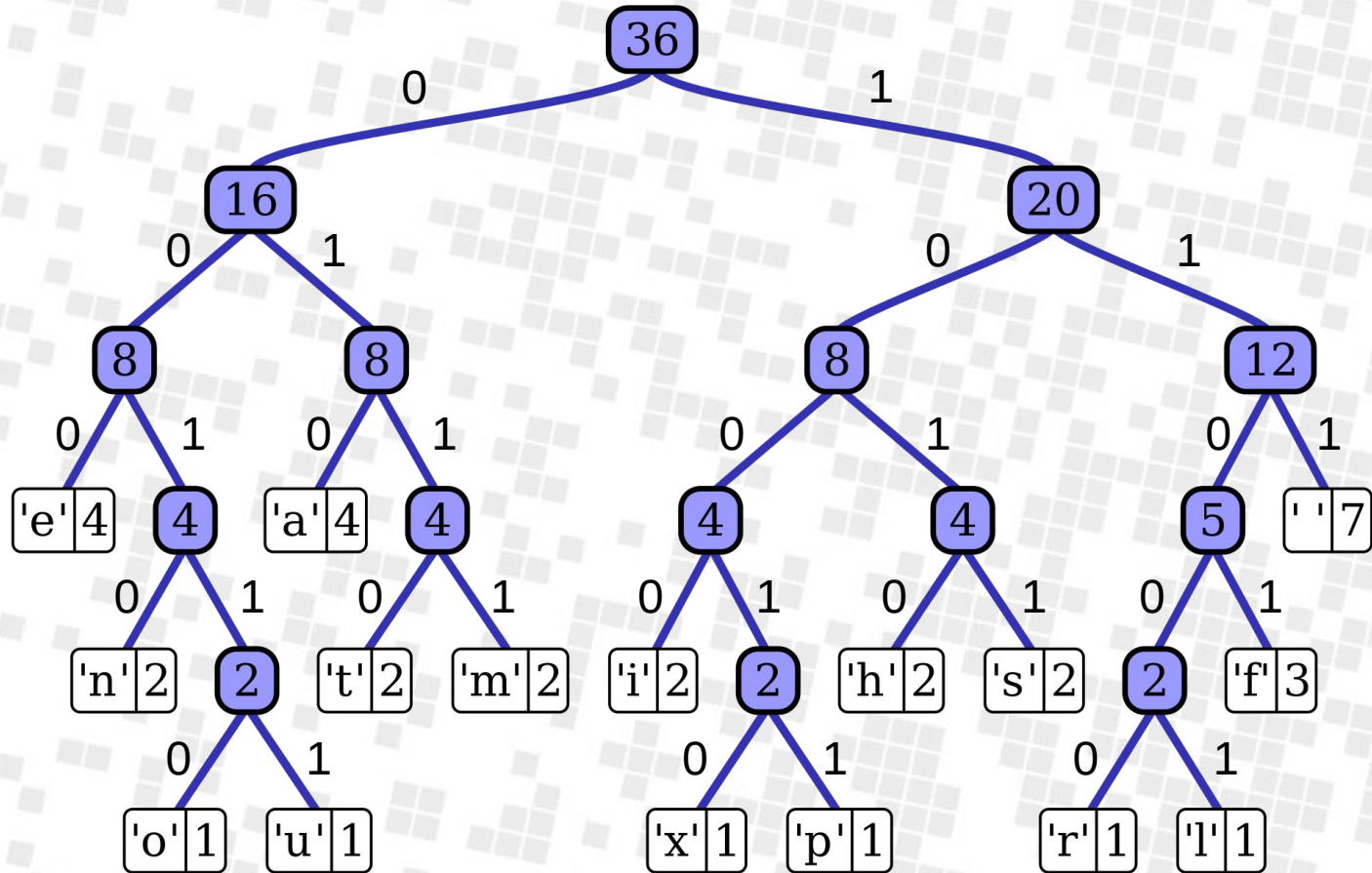
0: Option 1  
100: Option 2  
101: Option 3  
11: Option 4

# Huffman coding

By Meteficha - Own work, Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2875155>

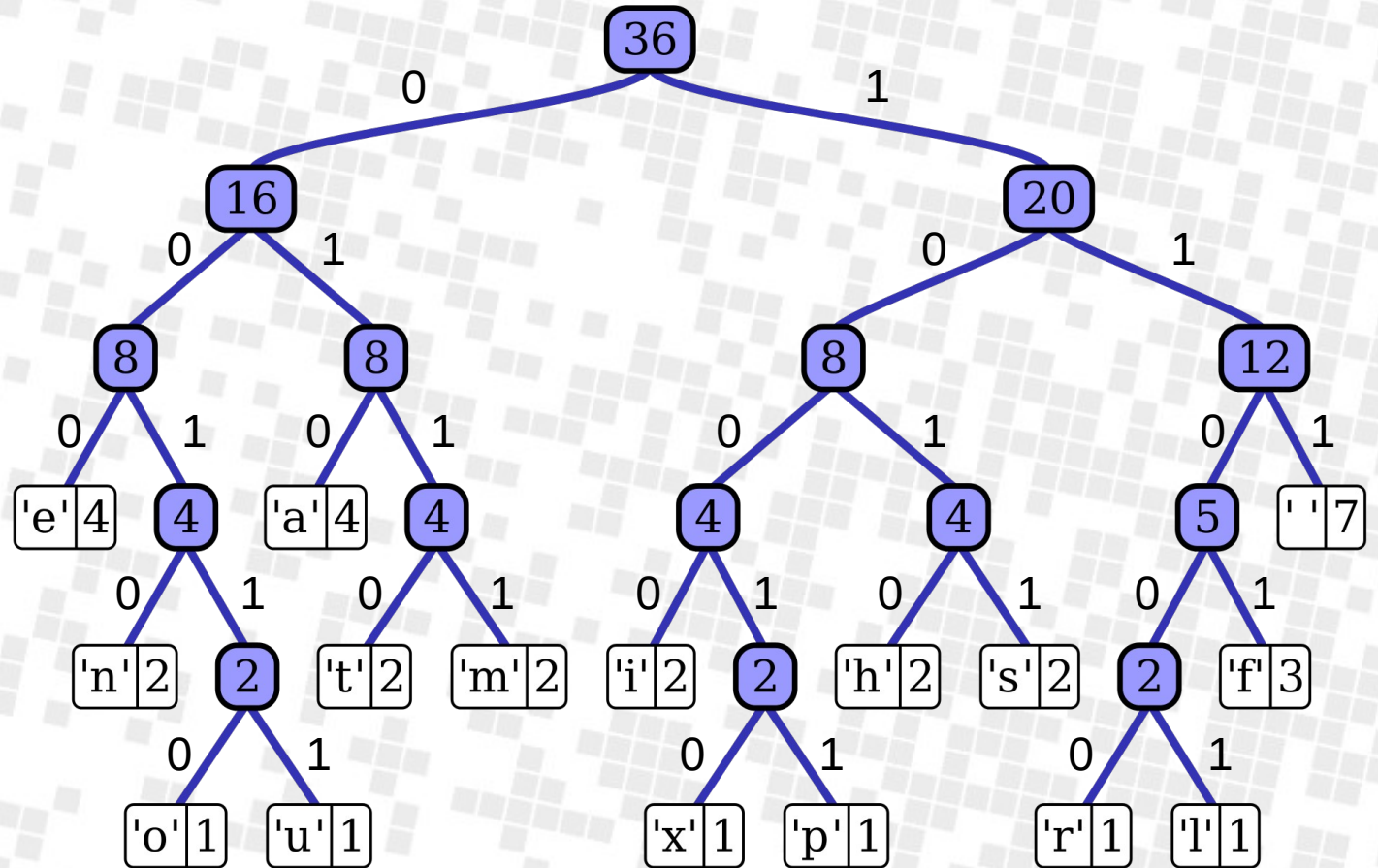


# Huffman coding



# Huffman coding

Letter	Code
e	000
n	0010
o	00110
u	00111
a	010
t	0110
m	0111
i	1000
x	10010
p	10011
h	1010
s	1011
r	11000
l	11001
f	1101
'	111



# Huffman coding

h e l l o

01101000 01100101 01101100 01101100 01101111

Letter	Code
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h	1010
s	1011
r	11000
l	11001
f	1101
'	111

h e l l o

01101000 01100101 01101100 01101100 01101111 40 bits

1010 000 11001 11001 00110 22 bits

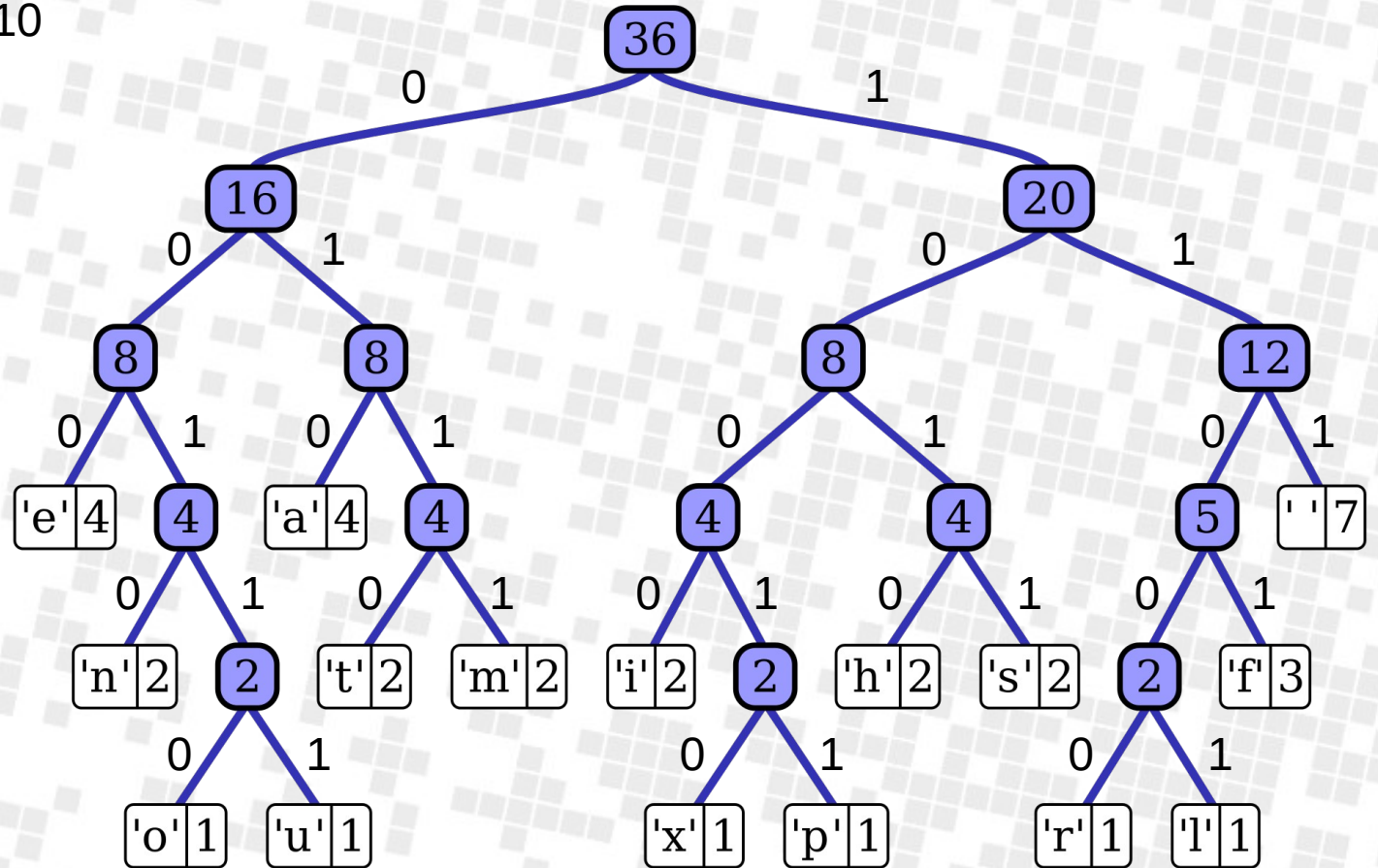


# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

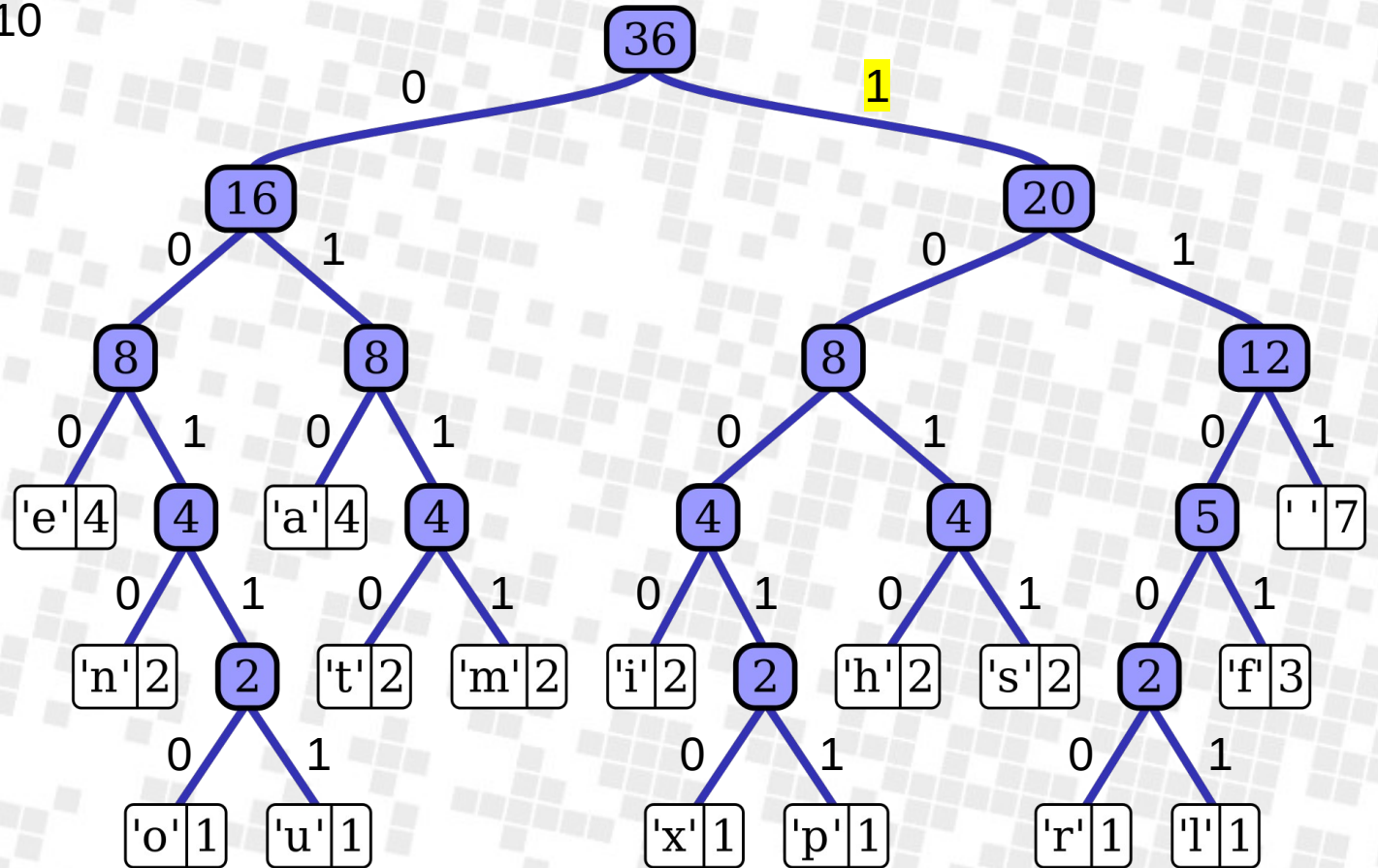
# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110



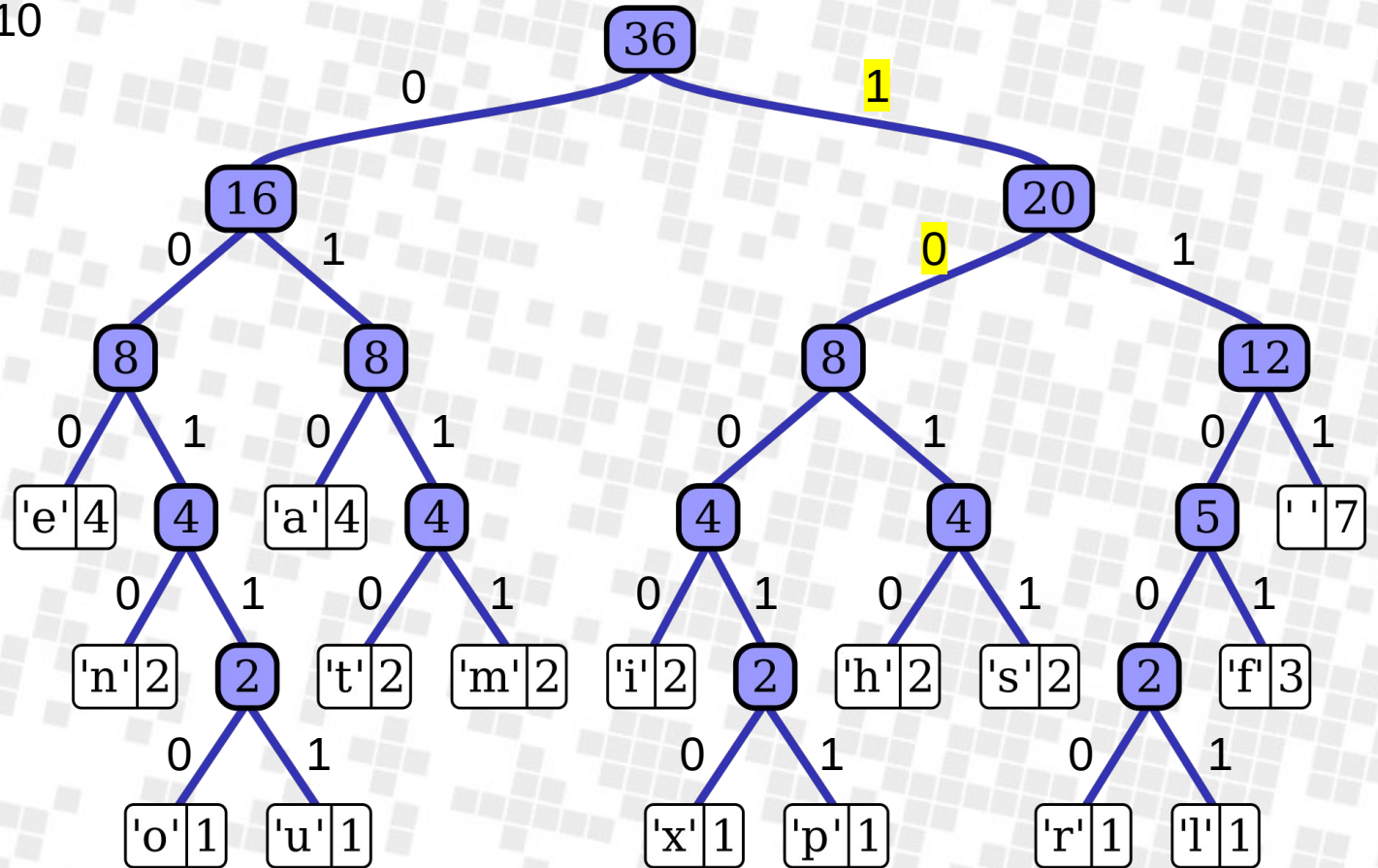
# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110



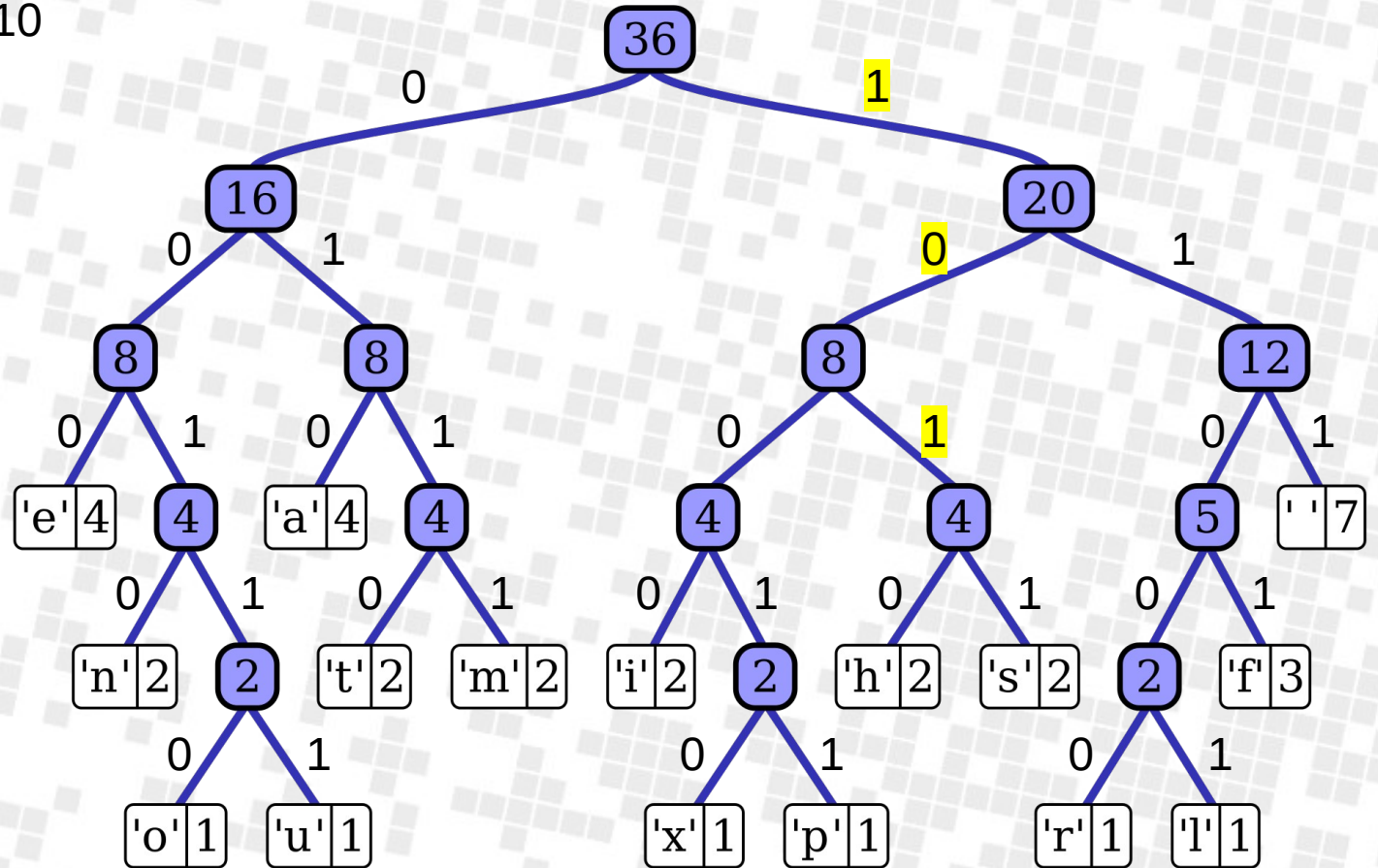
# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110



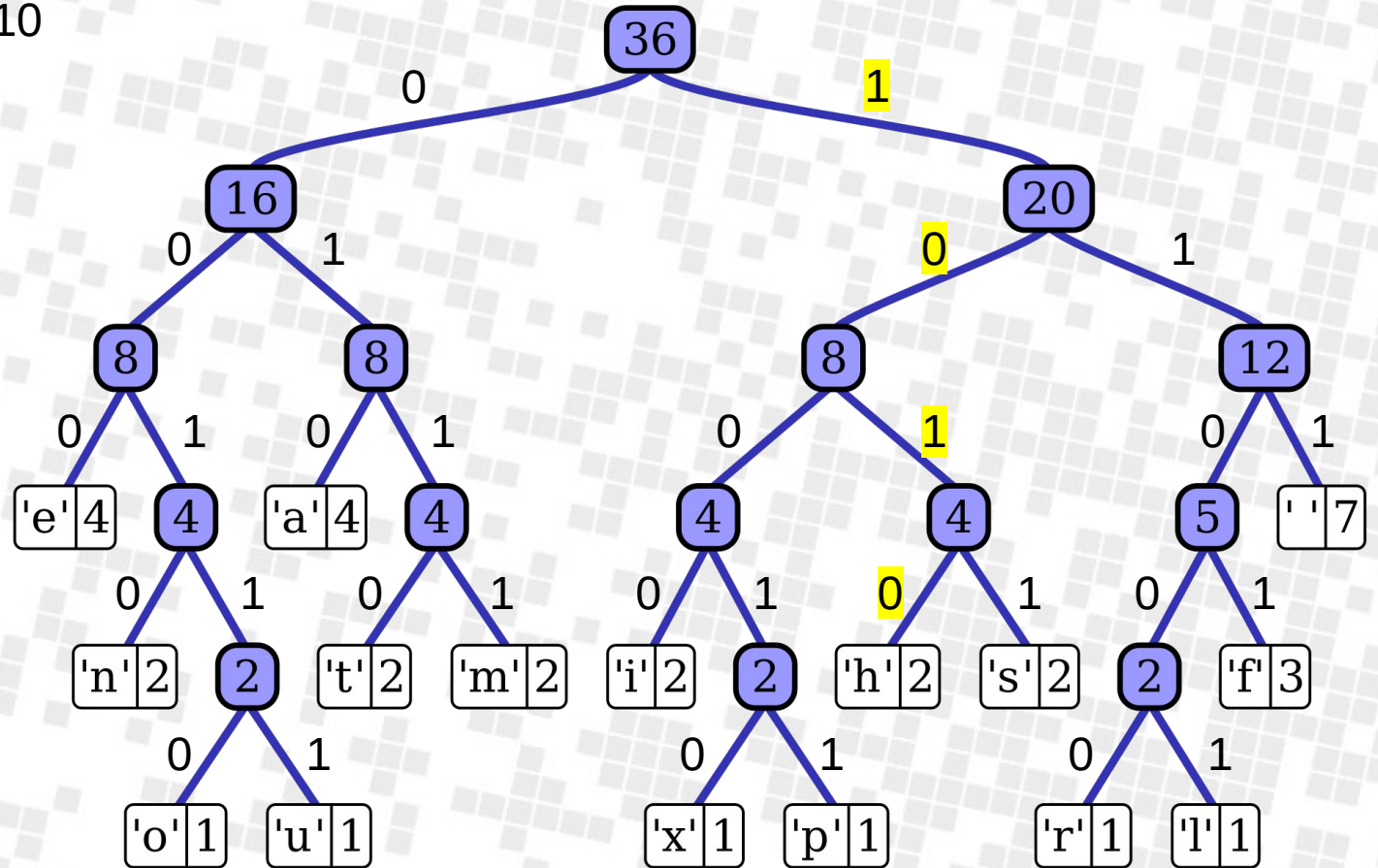
# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110



# Huffman coding

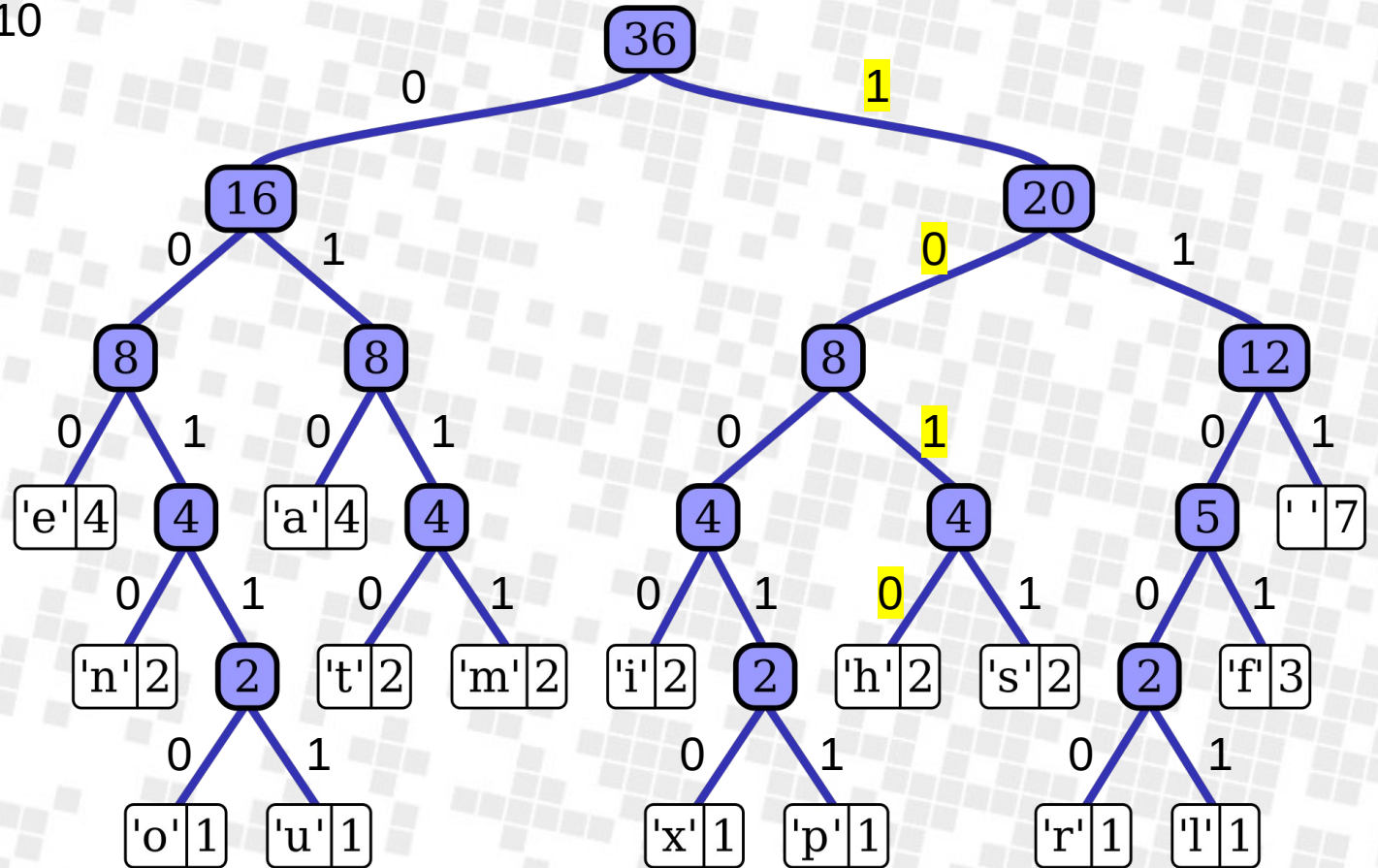
1010000110011100100110



# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

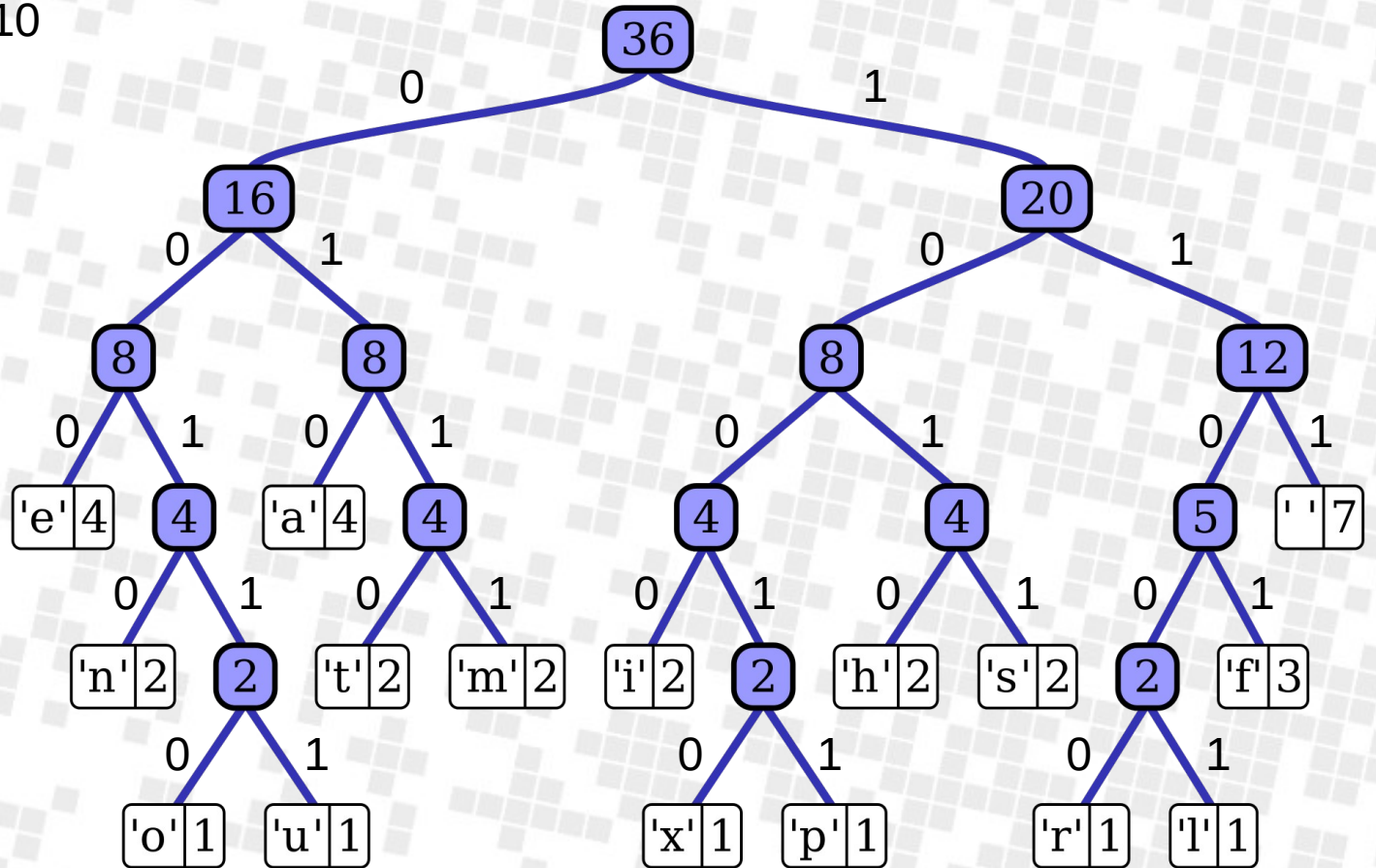
h



# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

h

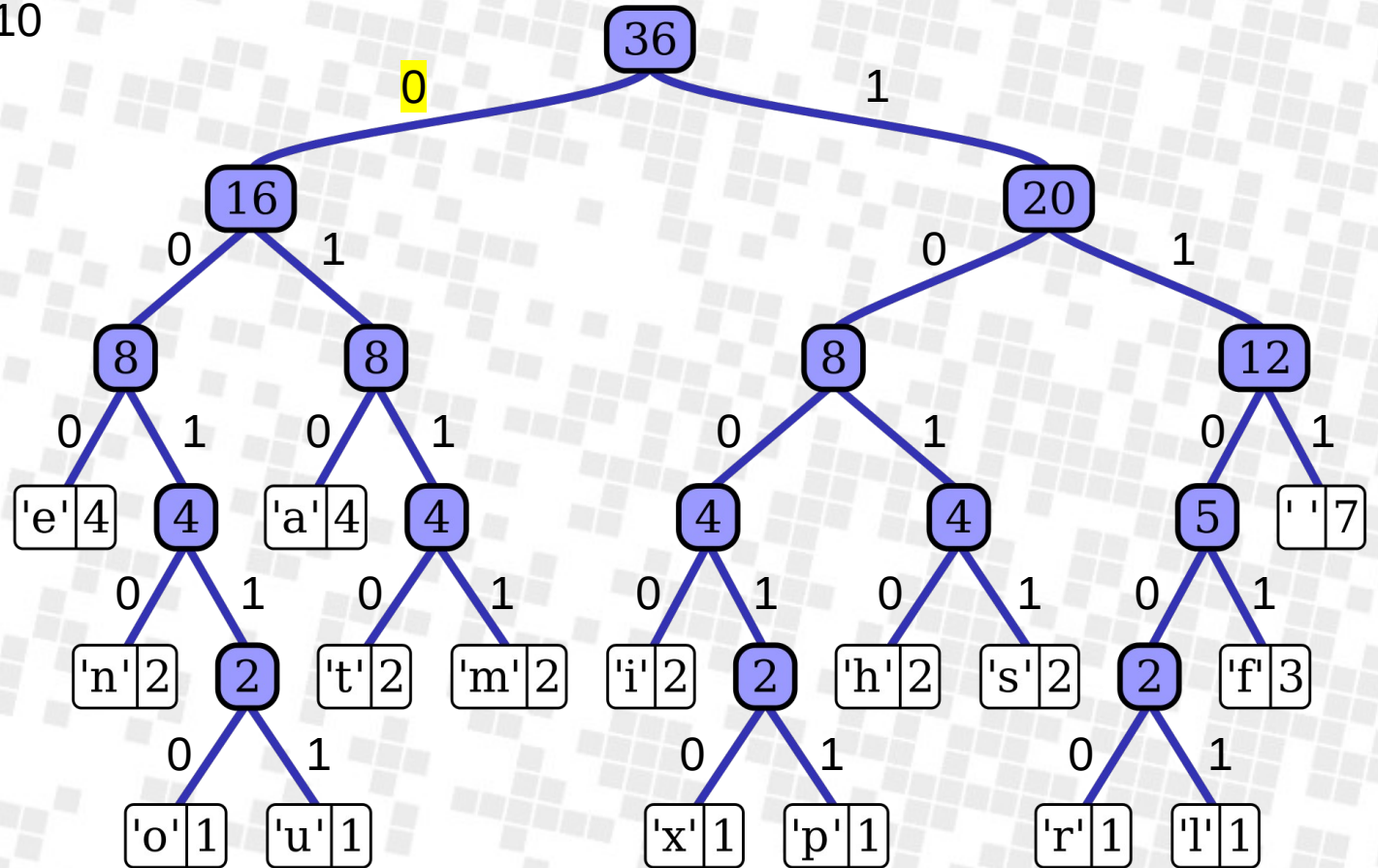




# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

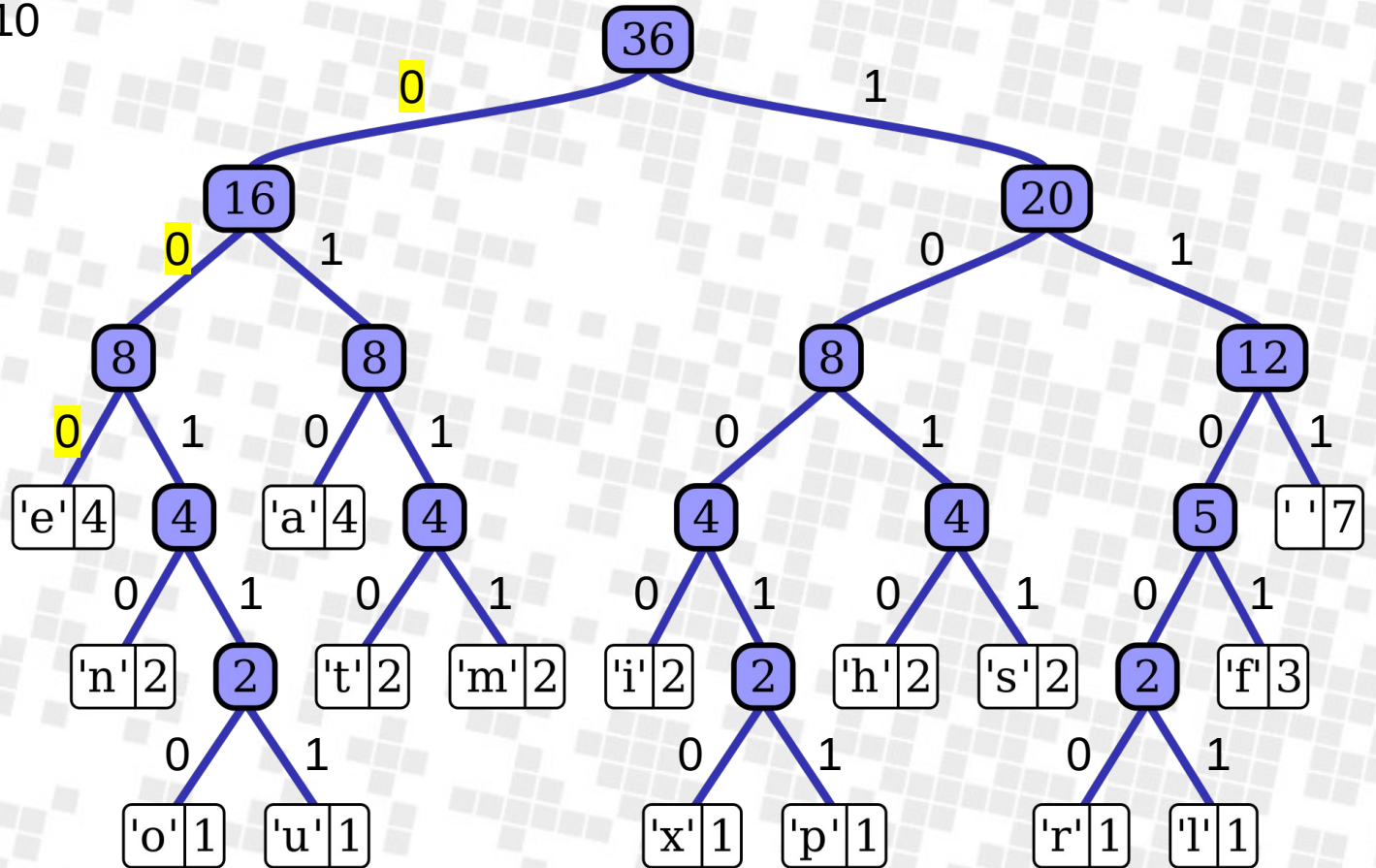
h



# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

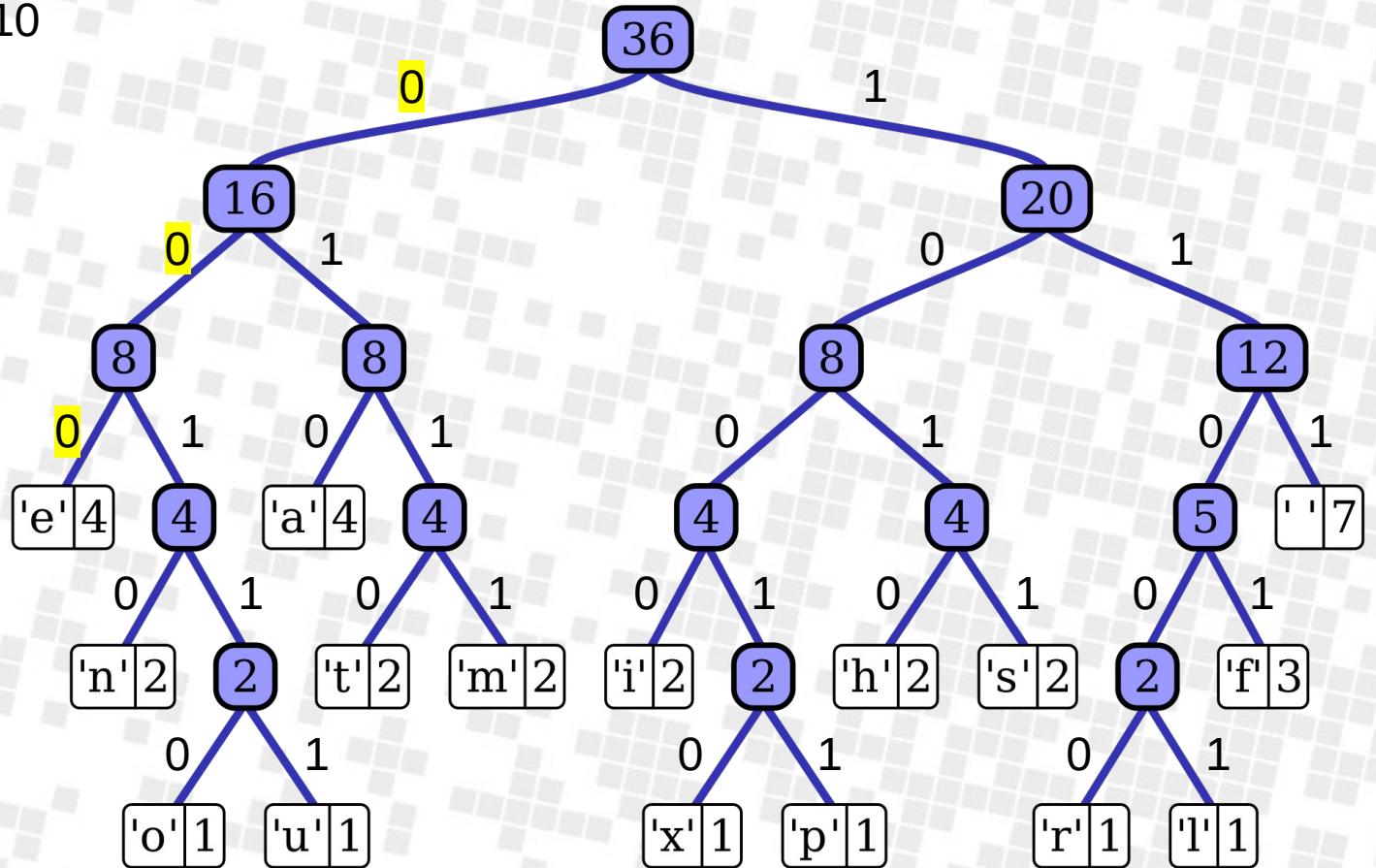
h



# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

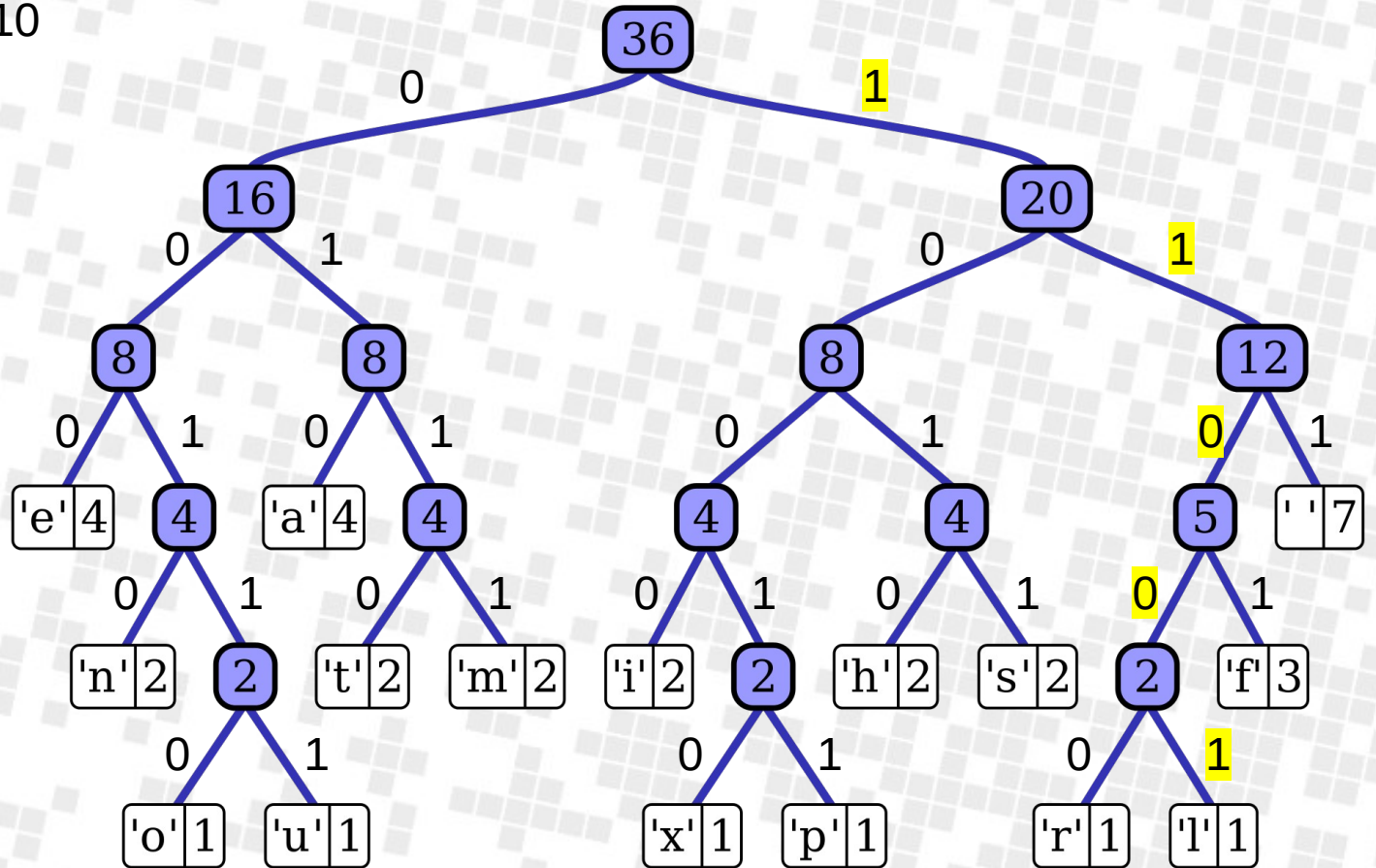
he



# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

he

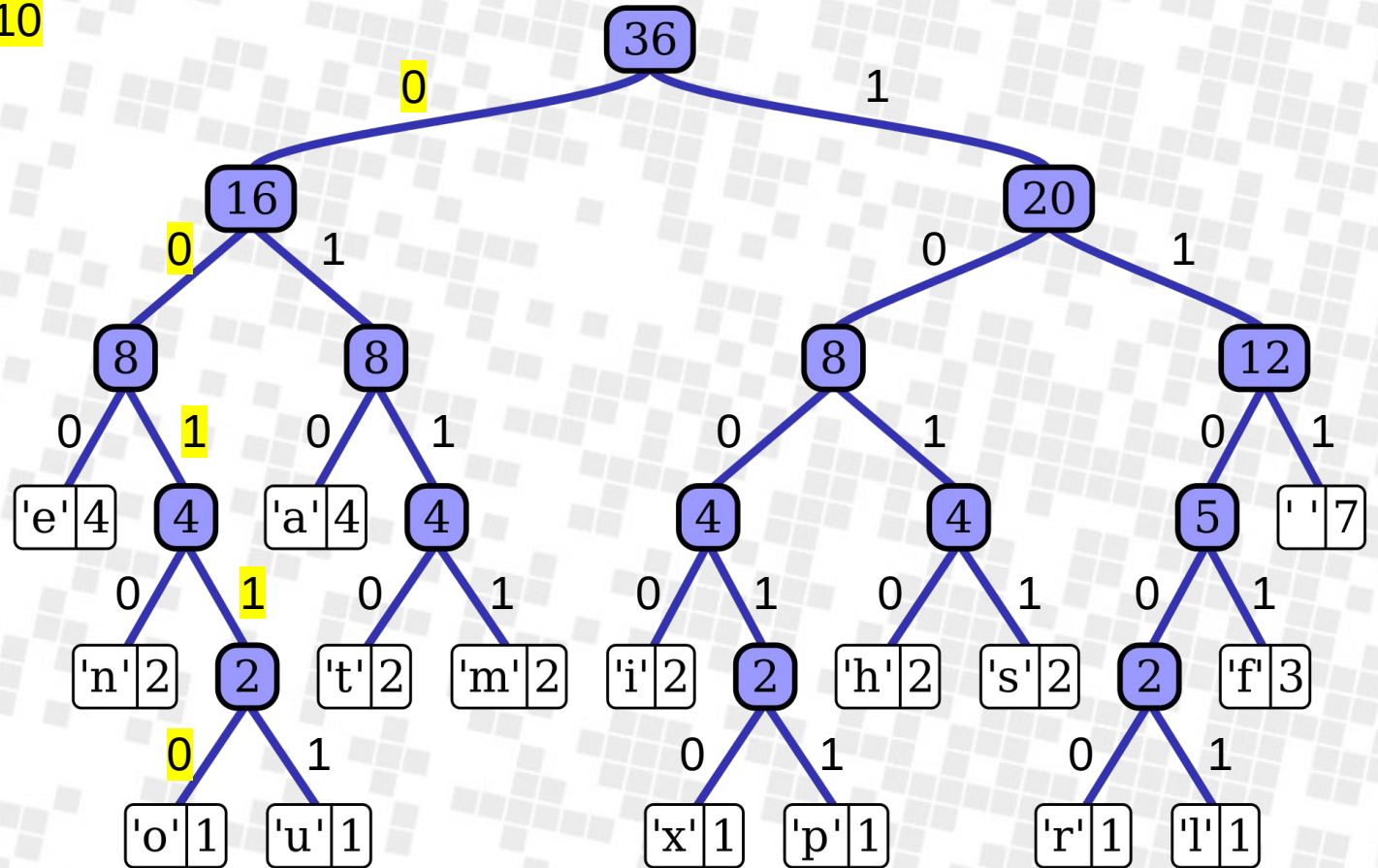




# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

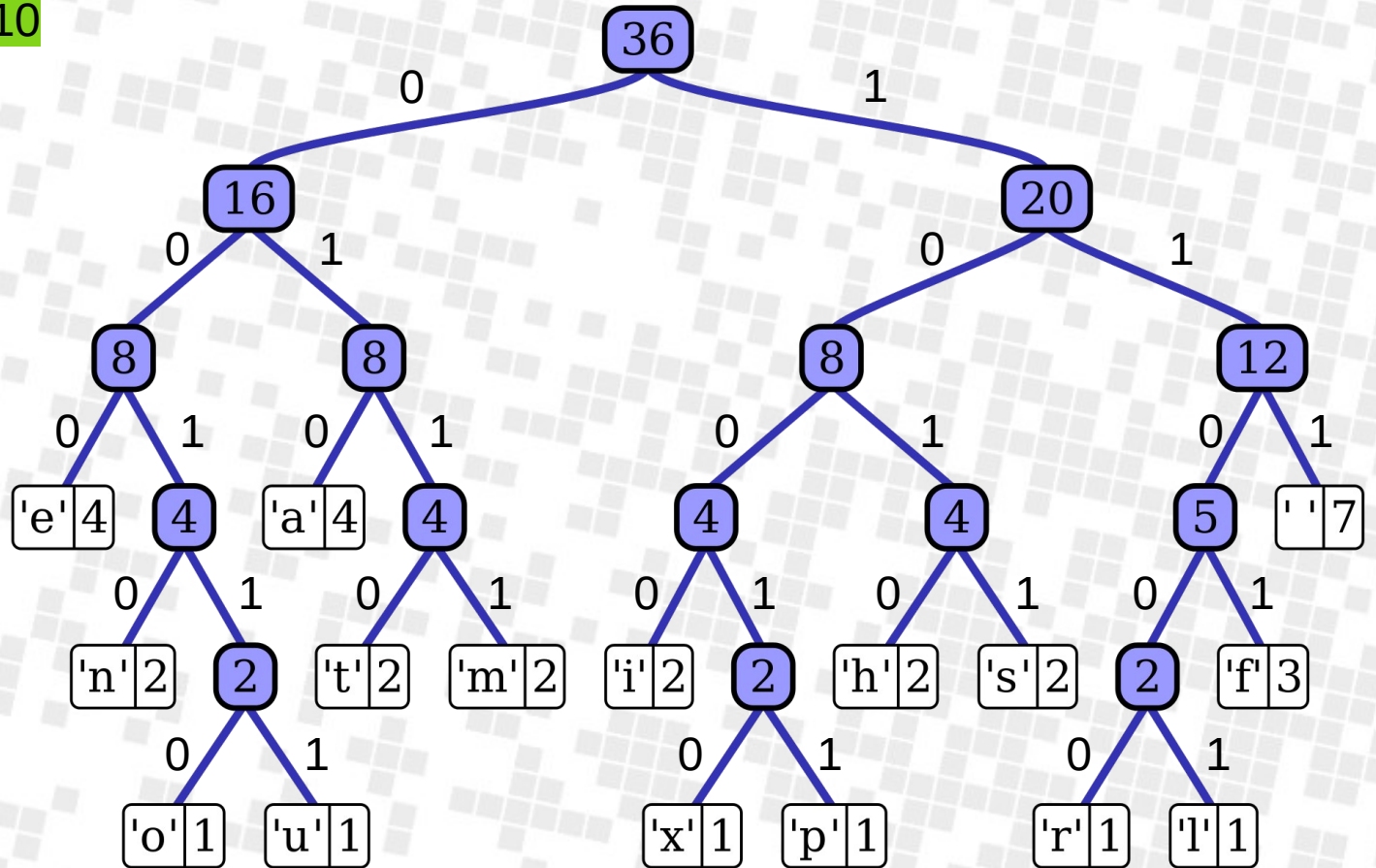
hell



# Huffman coding

1010000110011100100110

hello



# Huffman coding

- General purpose technique
- Implicit table
  - Known input likelihoods
  - FFT coefficients, text data, XML files
  - Has to accommodate any input values
- Explicit table
  - Unknown input likelihood
  - Full input available to create table
  - Can leave out values that do not happen to occur



# Huffman coding

Letter	Code
e	000
n	0010
o	00110
u	00111
a	010
t	0110
m	0111
i	1000
x	10010
p	10011
h	1010
s	1011
r	11000
l	11001
f	1101
'	111

h e l l o

01101000 01100101 01101100 01101100 01101111 40 bits

1010 000 11001 11001 00110 22 bits

# Bytepacking / bitpacking

- Encoding actual data into as few as possible bytes or bits
- Bytepacked is typically easier to write code for
- Bitpacked is more compact
- Sometimes mixed; packing fields into bytes first

# Talk overview

- The basics
- **Step 1: Designing a binary file format**
- Step 2: Reverse engineering binary files

# Problems with binary file parsing

- Endianness
  - Easy to handle with a library
- Newline conversion
  - Problem that's almost entirely left in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

# Types of binary files

- Flat
- Header-flat
- Header-index-data
- Record based
- Chunked

# “Flat” files

- RAW images
- Lookup tables
- Palettes

159	6.0	24	4.0	87	14%	1%
237	9.0	37	4.3	129	8%	1%
262	16.0	24	6.0	337	6%	7%
305	3.7	67	4.3	413	3%	8%
356	16.0	49	3.9	327	7%	16%
375	0.0	94	0.0	50	0%	0%
392	0.2	98	0	38	0%	2%
408	3.2	87	6.5	562	0%	45%
452	25.0	51	4.9	326	2%	22%
518	26.0	65	7	54	12%	6%

# Header-flat

- Can often be read as flat data by assuming values from the header
- Can easily be written by hard-coding a useful header
  - BMP, WAV, AVI

# Header-index-data

- Archive files
- Basic animations



# Record sequence

- “Record” is Header-data
- TAR
- GIF
- PNG

# Chunked files

- FBX, Blender files (3D modeling data)
  - AVI, WebM, Matroska (Movies/films)
  - (XML)
  - Protobuf
- 
- Like records, but most chunks contain subchunks

# How is the file to be used?

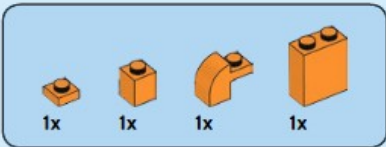
- Data arrives incrementally – streaming
  - DVD, internet video
- Data is huge but we only need parts of it – mappable
  - Databases, filesystems
- We need the whole thing to use it at all – loadable
  - Images, 3D models

# Step 1: Use cases

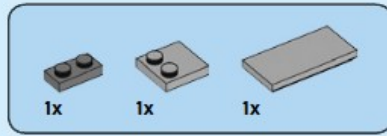
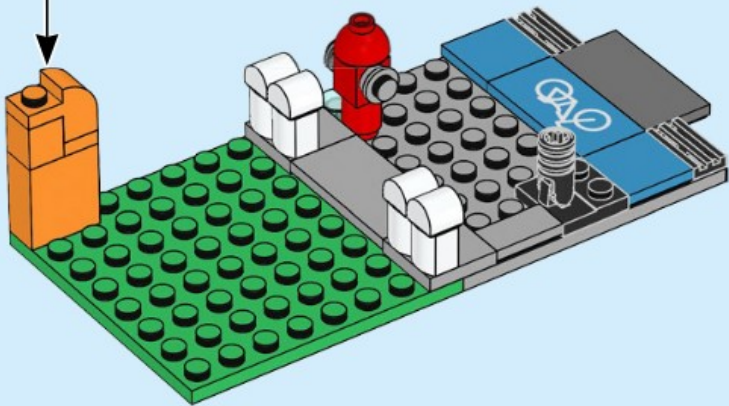
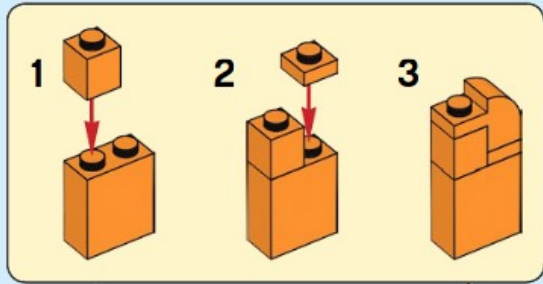
- What should the data be formatted to do optimally?
  - Data-driven algorithms are often data-speed-bounded
- Data in memory to run some operation is called the “working set”
- We want to make the “working set” for typical operations to be efficiently loadable



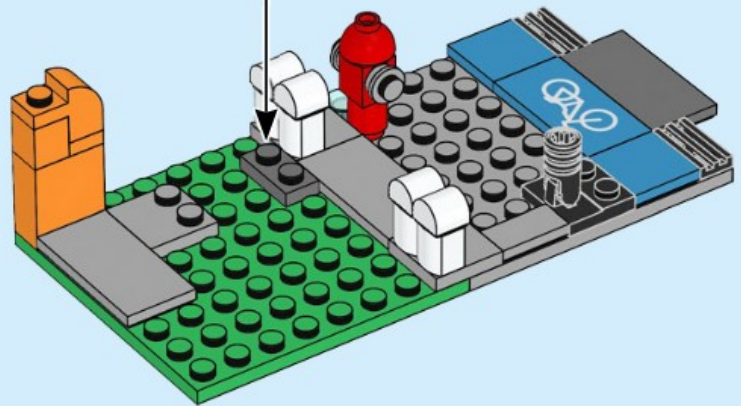
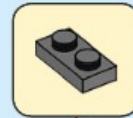




10



11



# Caching

- Computers have a fixed amount of cache
- Optimizing for cache size makes the **effective** cache size bigger
  - More useful information in the cache
  - Or fitting all useful information in a smaller (and faster) cache (like L2 over L3).



# Caching

- Caching includes main memory
  - Large files
  - Paging (4k – 16k – 64k)
- Caching includes the whole storage subsystem
  - Huge files

# Step 1: Use cases

- Video viewing formats store audio along with the video frame they go with
  - Needed at the same time
- Video editing formats have a second image stream
  - Faster feedback while seeking

# Step 2: Data model

- Relationships
- Multiplicities
- Sizes
- Counts
- Types

# Step 2: Data model

- How much of something?
- Are there useful groupings?
- What indexes?

## Step 3: Group bottom-up, index top-down

- Group information that is used together
  - These will share cache lines or pages
- Separate data that is not usually used together
- Store disparate (large) structures separately
- Add an index to find things in large structures
  - No data format can beat not even looking

# Step 4: Create specific file format

- Often based on abstractions from pure binary provided by libraries
  - Avro, Protobuf, serialization libraries
- In some cases, creating a separate abstraction can be better
  - Arrays

# Step 4: Create specific file format

- Prefer optimized data structures over generic code reuse
  - B+-trees (filesystems, databases)
  - radix trees (text indices)
  - Octree, quadtree, BSP (games, geospatial data)
  - Hash tables (ELF)

# Step 4: Create specific file format

- Start the file with a magic value and a version number
  - Error path should be early and quick
- Big-endian, little-endian, endian-agnostic?
  - For directly mapped formats you need to match the endianness of the CPU
- Better option is to create view types



# Step 5: Provide access

- Load or memory map the file
  - Consider `MAP_LOCKED` and `MAP_POPULATE` for servers
- Load from the file
  - Enough to know that it's valid
  - Map indexes

# Step 5: Provide access

- Provide view-style access to the indexes
  - Know where the data is, but do not load until required
- Depending on access patterns
  - Add caching for long-tail style data (some accessed often, many not accessed, overhead in loading)

# Step 6: Iterate the design

- Create measurements to see how well it does in what you want it to do
- Create variations to compare specifics
- Check on target hardware!

# Versioning

- Multiple readers
  - One per version
    - Works well, but duplicates lots of code
  - One unified one with tons of if statements
    - Spaghetti

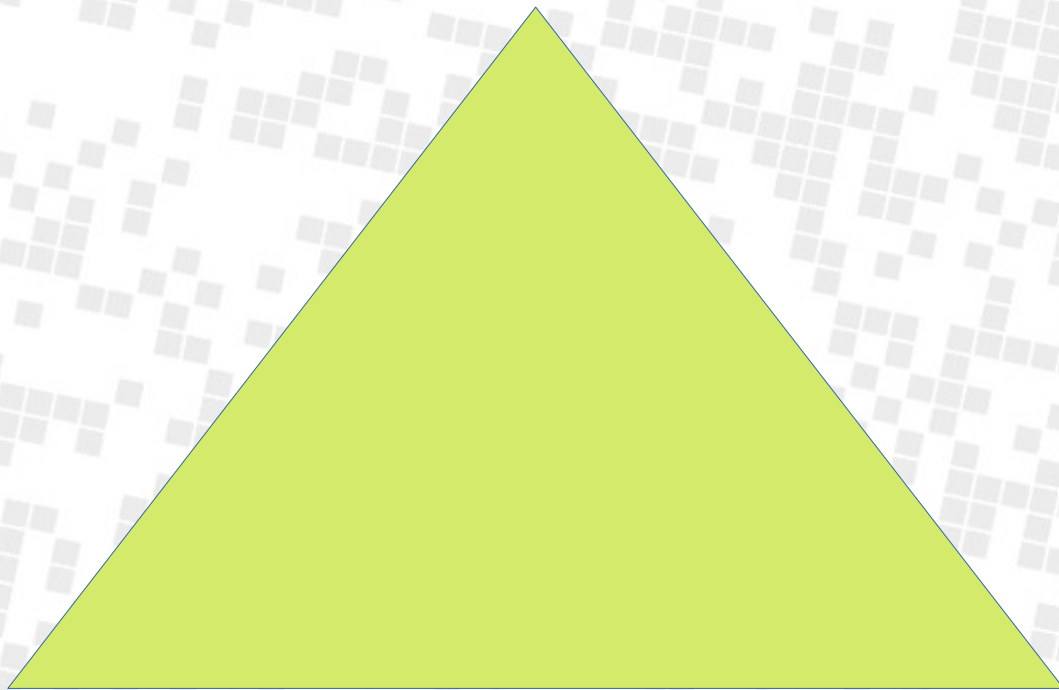
# Versioning

- Backward compatible
  - Unified reader with conditionals to handle old versions
  - Most commonly used formats have this
    - BMP, DOC, DOCX, ODT, PNG, JPG, EXE, TAR, ELF, ...

# Versioning

- Backward and forward compatible
  - Protobuf – still needs lots of actual work to be used
  - Self-describing files: Avro, Blender
    - Does help if you get a random file without knowing the data model

**Cheap**



**Compact**

**Fast**

# Talk overview

- The basics
- Step 1: Designing a binary file format
- **Step 2: Reverse engineering binary files**



# Part 3: Reverse engineering a file format

- Why?
  - Many bits of software are used to encode and store data
  - Most of this software turns into abandonware, and the encoded data is unreadable by anyone
  - Happens to computer games a **lot**



# CRUSADER

NO + REMORSE™

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Press Start Button



## Step 0: See if somebody else did this for you already

- An hour of googling can save you a month of work
- But where's the fun in that?
- For Crusader: No Remorse,
  - ScummVM has an implementation that mostly works
  - Ultima8 (predecessor) is well-documented
  - I used both resources for reverse engineering, mostly from Ultima8 documentation (since it's much more readable than source code)
    - The games differ enough that everything is slightly off and wrong

# Step 1: Use the `file` tool to see if it knows

- Bitmaps!
  - cred.dat: PC bitmap, Windows 3.x format, 640 x 480 x 8, cbSize 308278, bits offset 1078
  - help1.dat: PC bitmap, Windows 3.x format, 640 x 480 x 8, image size 307200, 256 important colors, cbSize 308278, bits offset 1078
  - help2.dat: PC bitmap, Windows 3.x format, 640 x 480 x 8, image size 307200, 256 important colors, cbSize 308278, bits offset 1078
  - help3.dat: PC bitmap, Windows 3.x format, 640 x 480 x 8, image size 307202, cbSize 308280, bits offset 1078



### GAME CONTROL

**F1** HELP SCREEN  
**F2** OPTIONS SCREEN  
**F4** QUICK LOAD  
**F5** QUICK SAVE  
**F8** LOAD SCREEN  
**F9** SAVE SCREEN  
**+** INCREASE MUSIC VOLUME  
**-** DECREASE MUSIC VOLUME  
**A** TARGETING RETICLE ON/OFF  
**Esc** GAME OR MAIN MENU  
**Alt+K** EXIT TO DOS

### PLAYER INTERFACE

**Space** **O** FIRE WEAPON  
**U** **Del** USE INVENTORY ITEM  
**m** USE MEDIKIT  
**O** **-** CYCLE THROUGH INVENTORY  
**I** REVERSE THROUGH INVENTORY  
**W** **\*** CYCLE THROUGH WEAPONS  
**Q** REVERSE THROUGH WEAPONS  
**Ctrl+O** DROP WEAPON  
**S** **+** SEARCH / SELECT  
**Enter** MANIPULATE SELECTED ITEM OR SPEAK TO SELECTED PERSON  
**G** GRAB EXPOSED ITEMS FOR INVENTORY  
**B** DETONATE BOMB  
**E** SHIELD ON/OFF  
**Z** CENTER CAMERA  
**Tab** or **J** JUMP

( **□** = NUMBER KEYPAD )

**NEXT** **QUIT**

### KEYBOARD MOVEMENT

**↑** WALK FORWARD  
**↓** RETREAT  
**←** TURN LEFT  
**→** TURN RIGHT

**Shift+↑** RUN  
**Shift+←** QUICK TURN LEFT  
**Shift+→** QUICK TURN RIGHT

**Cap Lock** FOR CONSTANT SHIFT

**Ctrl+↑** JUMP  
**Ctrl+↓** TOGGLE CROUCH  
**Ctrl+←** ROLL LEFT  
**Ctrl+→** ROLL RIGHT

**Alt+↑** ADVANCE  
**Alt+↓** RETREAT  
**Alt+←** SIDESTEP LEFT  
**Alt+→** SIDESTEP RIGHT

( **□** = NUMBER KEYPAD )

### KEYPAD MOVEMENT

**Num Lock** OFF  
**I** THRU **9** ABSOLUTE SCREEN MOVEMENT  
**S** TOGGLE CROUCH  
**Shift**+KEY ACCELERATE MOVEMENT FOR CONSTANT SHIFT

**Cap Lock** FOR CONSTANT SHIFT  
**Ctrl**+KEY ROLL  
**Alt**+KEY SIDESTEP

**Num Lock** ON  
**✓** ADVANCE  
**7** SIDE STEP LEFT  
**8** WALK FORWARD  
**9** SIDE STEP RIGHT  
**4** TURN LEFT





**S** TOGGLE CROUCH  
**6** TURN RIGHT  
**J** ROLL LEFT  
**2** RETREAT

**3** ROLL RIGHT  
**Ctrl+8** JUMP  
**Shift+8** RUN  
**Shift+7** QUICK TURN LEFT  
**Shift+6** QUICK TURN RIGHT

### EXTENDED KEYS

**INSERT** ROLL LEFT  
**HOME** ADVANCE  
**PAGE UP** ROLL RIGHT  
**DELETE** SIDE STEP LEFT  
**END** RETREAT  
**PAGE DOWN** SIDE STEP RIGHT

### MOUSE MOVEMENT

 TURN LEFT  
 SHOOT  
 TURN RIGHT  
 ADVANCE

**NEXT** **QUIT**





## Step 1: Use the `file` tool to see if it knows

- fixed.dat: DIY-Thermocam raw data (Lepton 2.x), scale -8346-24331, spot sensor temperature 0.000000, unit celsius, color scheme 0, calibration: offset 0.000000, slope 40171435775028625408.000000

# Step 1: Use the `file` tool to see if it knows

- cred.pal: data
- diff.pal: data
- gamepal.pal: data
- misc2.pal: data
- misc.pal: data
- star.pal: data
- anim.dat: data
- combat.dat: data
- credits.dat: data
- stuff.dat: data
- trig.dat: data
- typeflag.dat: data
- wpnovlay.dat: data
- xformpal.dat: data
- damage.flx: data
- dtable.flx: data
- fonts.flx: data
- glob.flx: data
- gumps.flx: data
- shapes.flx: data

# Step 2: Guess from the names

- Gamepal.pal: Game palette.
- Shapes.flx file: Game images? (90's term used to refer to in-game sprites)
- Typeinfo.dat: Info about types?
- Trig.dat: Trigonometry
- Combat, damage, dtable: Damage and fighting information, I guess?
- Usecode.flx: Useful code? Still, "code" in a data file - interesting
- Glob.flx: Globes??
- Gumps.flx: Gumps?????
- Fixed.dat: uh.... ?
- Stuff.dat: Oh come on now.

## Step 2.5: Use `strings` to look through files for text

- Usecode.flx has nearly all in-game strings
  - Looks and feels like executable code
  - Non-x86 – probably an in-game VM
    - Ultima8 has documentation on its usecode
- Credits.dat has the end-game credits

# Step 3: Identify file structure

- Header size (if any)
- Index into remainder?
- Fixed-size records?
- Size-prefixed records?
  - Somehow the original software has to be able to read this too, and it's not usually hard-coded in the software.

```
00000000 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000010 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000020 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000030 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000040 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000050 1a 1a 00 00 00 0c 00 00 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000060 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000070 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000080 80 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 9a 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 |.`. . . .`. . . .|
00000090 b4 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 ce 60 00 00 32 00 00 00 |.`. . . .`. . . .2. . .|
```

```
00000000 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000010 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000020 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000030 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000040 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000050 1a 1a 00 00 00 0c 00 00 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000060 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000070 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000080 80 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 9a 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 |.`. . . .`. . . .|
00000090 b4 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 ce 60 00 00 32 00 00 00 |.`. . . .`. . . .2. . .|
```

```
00000000 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000010 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000020 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000030 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000040 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a 1a |.....|
00000050 1a 1a 00 00 00 0c 00 00 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000060 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000070 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
00000080 80 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 9a 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 |.`. .`. .|.
00000090 b4 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00 ce 60 00 00 32 00 00 00 |.`. .`. .2. .|
```



```

00000080  80 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00  9a 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00  |.`. . . . . ` . . . . .|
00000090  b4 60 00 00 1a 00 00 00  ce 60 00 00 32 00 00 00  |.`. . . . . `..2...|

00006050  22 09 04 00 3e 00 00 00  60 09 04 00 62 00 00 00  |"...>...`...b...|
00006060  c2 09 04 00 56 00 00 00  18 0a 04 00 50 00 00 00  |...V.....P...|
00006070  68 0a 04 00 26 00 00 00  8e 0a 04 00 26 00 00 00  |h...&.....&...|
00006080  04 00 7f 7f 00 0f 00 00  ff 7f 00 0f 00 00 7f ff  |.....|
00006090  00 0f 00 00 ff ff 00 0f  00 00 04 00 7f 7f 00 2a  |.....*|

```

0x6080 - 0x80 == 0x6000

0x6000 / 8 == 0xc00

```
00006050 22 09 04 00 3e 00 00 00 60 09 04 00 62 00 00 00 |"...>...`...b...|
00006060 c2 09 04 00 56 00 00 00 18 0a 04 00 50 00 00 00 |...V.....P...|
00006070 68 0a 04 00 26 00 00 00 8e 0a 04 00 26 00 00 00 |h...&.....&...|
00006080 04 00 7f 7f 00 0f 00 00 ff 7f 00 0f 00 00 7f ff |.....|
00006090 00 0f 00 00 ff ff 00 0f 00 00 04 00 7f 7f 00 2a |.....*|
```

0x6080 - 0x80 == 0x6000

0x6000 / 8 == 0xC00

```
00000050 1a 1a 00 00 00 0c 00 00 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 |.....|
```

```
00006070  68 0a 04 00 26 00 00 00 8e 0a 04 00 26 00 00 00 |h...&.....&...|
00006080  04 00 7f 7f 00 0f 00 00 ff 7f 00 0f 00 00 7f ff |.....|
00006090  00 0f 00 00 ff ff 00 0f 00 00 04 00 7f 7f 00 2a |.....*|
```

0x40a68 + 0x26 == 0x40a8e

0x40a8e + 0x26 == 0x40ab4

```
00040a80  00 00 ff ff 00 18 04 01 ff ff 60 19 04 01 06 00 |.....`.....|
00040a90  7f ff 00 0f 00 00 7f 7f 00 0f 00 00 ff 7f 00 0f |.....|
00040aa0  00 00 ff ff 00 0f 00 00 ff 7f 00 18 04 00 ff 7f |.....|
00040ab0  60 19 04 00 |`...|
```

# FLX file: Archive file

- Now we can decode the \*.flx files!
- But actually...



# FLX file: Archive file

- Now we can decode the \*.flx files!
- Write tool to extract chunks from FLX files
  - Continue analyzing the chunks found in there

# 4. Spot patterns for fixed size entries

```
00004530 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 |... ..|
00004540 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 |.... ..|
00004550 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 00 |..... ..|
00004560 84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 |..... ..|
00004570 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 |. ....|
00004580 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 |... ..|
00004590 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 |..... ..|
000045a0 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 00 |..... ..|
000045b0 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
000045c0 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 |... ..|
000045d0 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 |.... ..|
000045e0 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 00 |..... ..|
000045f0 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 00 |..... ..|
00004600 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 |. ....|
00004610 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 |... ..|
00004620 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00 |..... ..|
```

# 4. Spot patterns for fixed size entries

00004530	03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00	00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00	... ..
00004540	00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00	00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00	... ..
00004550	00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84	00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20	... ..
00004560	84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00	20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03	... ..
00004570	00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00	03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00	. ....
00004580	00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00	00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00	... ..
00004590	00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00	00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84	... ..
000045a0	00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20	84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00	... ..
000045b0	20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03	00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00	. ....
000045c0	03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00	00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00	... ..
000045d0	00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00	00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00	... ..
000045e0	00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84	00 00 00 00 00 03 00 20	... ..
000045f0	84 00 00 00 00 00 03 00	20 84 00 00 00 00 00 03	... ..
00004600	00 20 84 00 00 00 00 00	03 00 20 84 00 00 00 00	. ....
00004610	00 03 00 20 84 00 00 00	00 00 03 00 20 84 00 00	... ..
00004620	00 00 00 03 00 20 84 00	00 00 00 00 03 00 20 84	... ..



# 4. Spot patterns for fixed size entries

00000000	00 00 00 01 00 00 00 00	01	.....
00000009	02 60 60 0c 05 00 04 32	32	.``....22
00000012	0b 00 00 05 06 10 00 00	00	.....
0000001b	03 00 00 21 00 00 00 00	00	...!.....
00000024	0b 00 c0 84 00 00 00 00	00	.....
0000002d	03 10 c0 84 05 00 00 00	00	.....
00000036	0b 00 00 06 06 00 00 00	00	.....
0000003f	0b 00 20 40 06 00 00 00	00	.. @.....
00000048	0b 00 00 06 06 00 00 00	00	.....
00000051	0b 00 20 40 06 00 00 00	00	.. @.....
0000005a	0b 00 20 08 06 00 00 00	00	.. .....
00000063	0b 00 80 10 00 00 00 00	00	.....
0000006c	0b 00 00 06 06 00 00 00	00	.....
00000075	0b 00 20 40 06 00 00 00	00	.. @.....
0000007e	0b 00 20 10 06 00 00 00	00	.. .....
00000087	03 00 00 42 00 00 00 00	00	...B.....

# Typeinfo.dat:

- Fixed size entry. 9 bytes each
- File is 18432 bytes
  - Exactly  $2048 * 9$
- Looks like 2048 entries without a header
  - Shapes.flx also has 2048 entries
- Each entry is bitpacked type data per shape!

# Fixed.dat (entry 0)

```
00000000 ff 03 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000010 ff 05 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000020 ff 07 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000030 ff 09 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000040 ff 0b ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000050 ff 0d ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000060 ff 03 ff 05 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000070 fc 04 10 04 10 e9 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 71 1a | .....q.|
00000080 ff 05 ff 05 00 10 00 00 00 00 8e 0b 00 08 72 1a | .....r.|
00000090 44 05 44 05 00 88 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 ca 1a |D.D.....|
000000a0 37 05 35 05 08 db 01 00 00 00 0c 00 00 00 00 |7.5.....|
000000b0 15 07 0f 04 10 e9 01 01 00 00 00 00 00 77 1a | .....w.|
000000c0 eb 07 e9 04 00 27 05 00 00 04 00 00 00 78 1a | .....'| .....x.|
000000d0 ff 07 7f 04 00 26 05 00 00 04 00 00 00 79 1a | .....&.....y.|
```

# Fixed.dat

- No header
- Fixed size entry
  - 16 bytes

# Fixed.dat (entry 0)

- Guess a field
- Check the values to see if we can find errors
  - Lather, rinse, repeat. Trial and error.
- Gets us to this

# Fixed.dat (entry 0)

```
00000000 ff 03 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000010 ff 05 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000020 ff 07 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000030 ff 09 ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000040 ff 0b ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000050 ff 0d ff 03 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000060 ff 03 ff 05 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 | .....|
00000070 fc 04 10 04 10 e9 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 71 1a | .....q.|
00000080 ff 05 ff 05 00 10 00 00 00 00 8e 0b 00 08 72 1a | .....r.|
00000090 44 05 44 05 00 88 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 ca 1a |D.D.....|
000000a0 37 05 35 05 08 db 01 00 00 00 0c 00 00 00 00 00 |7.5.....|
000000b0 15 07 0f 04 10 e9 01 01 00 00 00 00 00 00 77 1a | .....w.|
000000c0 eb 07 e9 04 00 27 05 00 00 04 00 00 00 00 78 1a | .....'| .....x.|
000000d0 ff 07 7f 04 00 26 05 00 00 04 00 00 00 00 79 1a | .....&.....y.|
```

# Fixed.dat

- No header, fixed size entry, 16 bytes
- But by far most of them are type 0x10?

# Fixed.dat (entry 0)

```
00010e70 ff 55 ff 49 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 |.U.I.....|
00010e80 ff 57 ff 49 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 |.W.I.....|
00010e90 ff 59 ff 49 00 10 00 00 00 00 f5 0a 00 00 00 00 |.Y.I.....|
00010ea0 ff 5b ff 49 00 10 00 00 00 00 fb 0a 00 00 00 00 |.[.I.....|
00010eb0 ff 5d ff 49 00 10 00 00 00 00 fc 0a 00 00 00 00 |.]I.....|
00010ec0 ff 5f ff 49 00 10 00 00 00 00 fd 0a 00 00 00 00 |._.I.....|
00010ed0 ff 71 ff 49 58 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 |.q.IX.....|
00010ee0 ff 73 ff 49 58 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 |.s.IX.....|
00010fe0 ff 75 ff 49 60 10 00 00 00 00 70 0b 00 00 16 16 |.u.I`.....p....|
000111a0 ff 77 ff 49 60 10 00 00 00 00 75 0b 00 00 21 0a |.w.I`.....u...!.|
00011230 ff 79 ff 49 60 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 00 00 00 00 |.y.I`.....|
00011240 ff 35 ff 4b 00 10 00 00 00 00 01 07 64 08 00 00 |.5.K.....d...|
00011250 ff 45 ff 4b 00 10 00 00 00 00 02 00 64 08 00 00 |.E.K.....d...|
```



# Fixed.dat

- No header, fixed size entry, 16 bytes
- But by far most of them are type 0x10?
  - Basic compression
  - 0x10 entries are referring to globs
  - The yellow values indicate which glob

```
00000000  04 00 7f ff 00 50 01 00  ff ff 00 50 01 00  ff 7f  |.....P.....P....|
00000010  00 50 01 00 7f 7f 00 50  01 00                |.P.....P..|
```

26 byte file, starts with 2-byte value 0x04

```
00000000  0a 00 7f 7f 60 14 00 00  ff 7f 60 14 00 00  7f ff  |.....`.....`.....|
00000010  60 14 00 00 ff ff 60 14  00 00 07 7f 60 09 00 00  |`.....`.....`....|
00000020  07 ff 60 09 00 00 77 7f  60 09 00 00 77 ff 60 09  |..`...w.`...w.`..|
00000030  00 00 ff 7f 60 09 00 00  ff ff 60 09 00 00      |.....`.....`...|
```

62 byte file, starts with 2-byte value 0x0a

```
00000000  06 00 ff 7f 00 44 02 00  ff ff 00 44 02 00  7f ff  |.....D.....D....|
00000010  00 3d 02 00 7f 7f 00 3d  02 00 ff ff 00 3d 02 00  |.=.....=.....=...|
00000020  ff 7f 00 3d 02 00                |...=...|
```

38 byte file, starts with 2-byte value 0x06

```
00000000  04 00 7f ff 00 50 01 00  ff ff 00 50 01 00 ff 7f  |.....P.....P....|
00000010  00 50 01 00 7f 7f 00 50  01 00                |.P.....P..|
```

26 byte file, starts with 2-byte value 0x04, file size == 2 + 6 \* 4

```
00000000  0a 00 7f 7f 60 14 00 00  ff 7f 60 14 00 00 7f ff  |.....`.....`.....|
00000010  60 14 00 00 ff ff 60 14  00 00 07 7f 60 09 00 00  |`.....`.....`....|
00000020  07 ff 60 09 00 00 77 7f  60 09 00 00 77 ff 60 09  |..`...w.`...w.`..|
00000030  00 00 ff 7f 60 09 00 00  ff ff 60 09 00 00        |.....`.....`...|
```

62 byte file, starts with 2-byte value 0x0a, file size == 2 + 6 \* 10

```
00000000  06 00 ff 7f 00 44 02 00  ff ff 00 44 02 00 7f ff  |.....D.....D....|
00000010  00 3d 02 00 7f 7f 00 3d  02 00 ff ff 00 3d 02 00  |.=.....=.....=..|
00000020  ff 7f 00 3d 02 00                |...=..|
```

38 byte file, starts with 2-byte value 0x06, file size == 2 + 6 \* 6

# Globs.flx entry:

- Two byte header containing entry count
- 6-byte entries

7f ff 00 50 01 00

ff ff 00 50 01 00

ff 7f 00 50 01 00

7f 7f 00 50 01 00

ff 7f 00 44 02 00

ff ff 00 44 02 00

7f ff 00 3d 02 00

7f 7f 00 3d 02 00

ff ff 00 3d 02 00

ff 7f 00 3d 02 00

# Shapes.flx.452

```
00000000  01 00 01 00 08 00 46 00 00 80 8e 04 00 00 dc 04 |.....F.....|
00000010  00 80 9c 04 00 00 80 09 00 80 c6 04 00 00 4e 0e |.....N.|
00000020  00 80 9c 04 00 00 f2 12 00 80 9c 04 00 00 96 17 |.....|
00000030  00 80 d4 04 00 00 72 1c 00 80 f0 04 00 00 6a 21 |.....r.....j!|
00000040  00 80 b8 04 00 00 c5 01 00 00 5e c6 9e 00 01 00 |.....^.....|
00000050  00 00 10 00 00 00 68 00 00 00 07 00 00 00 67 00 |.....h.....g.|
00000060  00 00 a0 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 a1 01 |.....|
00000070  00 00 a1 01 00 00 a4 01 00 00 a9 01 00 00 b5 01 |.....|
```

# Shapes.flx.452

01 00 01 00 08 00

46 00 00 80 8e 04 00 00

dc 04 00 80 9c 04 00 00

80 09 00 80 c6 04 00 00

4e 0e 00 80 9c 04 00 00

f2 12 00 80 9c 04 00 00

96 17 00 80 d4 04 00 00

72 1c 00 80 f0 04 00 00

6a 21 00 80 b8 04 00 00

$0x46 + 0x48e == 0x4d4$

$0x4dc + 0x49c == 0x978$

$0x980 + 0x4c6 == 0xe46$

$0xe4e + 0x49c == 0x12ea$

$0x12f2 + 0x49c == 0x178e$

$0x1796 + 0x4d4 == 0x1c6a$

$0x1c72 + 0x4f0 == 0x2162$

$0x216a + 0x4b8 == 0x2622$

Offset and size?

# Shapes.flx entry:

- Frame data
- Per frame “subfile”
- Line data in RLE style



```
00000046  c5 01 00 00 5e c6 9e 00 01 00 00 00 10 00 00 00 |...^.....|
00000056  68 00 00 00 07 00 00 00 67 00 00 00 a0 01 00 00 |h.....g.....|
00000066  a1 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 |.....|

000001f6  c3 02 00 00 cc 02 00 00 d1 02 00 00 07 04 ba ba |.....|
00000206  07 05 0d ba 05 03 15 ba 03 01 1d ba 01 00 04 bb |.....|
00000216  bb 00 1d ba 00 08 bc bc 4d bb 00 19 ba 00 09 bc |.....M.....|
00000226  00 04 4d bb 00 0d ba 00 08 24 ba ba ba 00 0d bc |..M.....$.|
00000236  00 14 4d bb ba ba bb bb ba ba ba bb 00 0f bc 00 |..M.....|
```

```
00000046  c5 01 00 00 5e c6 9e 00 01 00 00 00 10 00 00 00 |....^.....|
00000056  68 00 00 00 07 00 00 00 67 00 00 00 a0 01 00 00 |h.....g.....|
00000066  a1 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 a1 01 00 00 |.....|

000001f6  c3 02 00 00 cc 02 00 00 d1 02 00 00 07 04 ba ba |.....|
00000206  07 05 0d ba 05 03 15 ba 03 01 1d ba 01 00 04 bb |.....|
00000216  bb 00 1d ba 00 08 bc bc 4d bb 00 19 ba 00 09 bc |.....M.....|
00000226  00 04 4d bb 00 0d ba 00 08 24 ba ba ba 00 0d bc |..M.....$.|
00000236  00 14 4d bb ba ba bb bb ba ba ba bb 00 0f bc 00 |..M.....|
```

07 04 ba ba 07

Skip 7 pixels, copy 2 values (0xba 0xba), skip 7

05 0d ba 05

Skip 5 pixels, put 6 copies of 0xba, skip 5

03 15 ba 03

Skip 3 pixels, put 10 copies of 0xba, skip 3

01 1d ba 01

Skip 1 pixel, put 14 copies of 0xba, skip 1

00 00 00 00 00 00 00 ba ba 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  
00 00 00 00 00 ba ba ba ba ba ba 00 00 00 00 00  
00 00 00 ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba 00 00 00  
00 ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba ba 00

# Let's draw shapes!



# Putting it all together

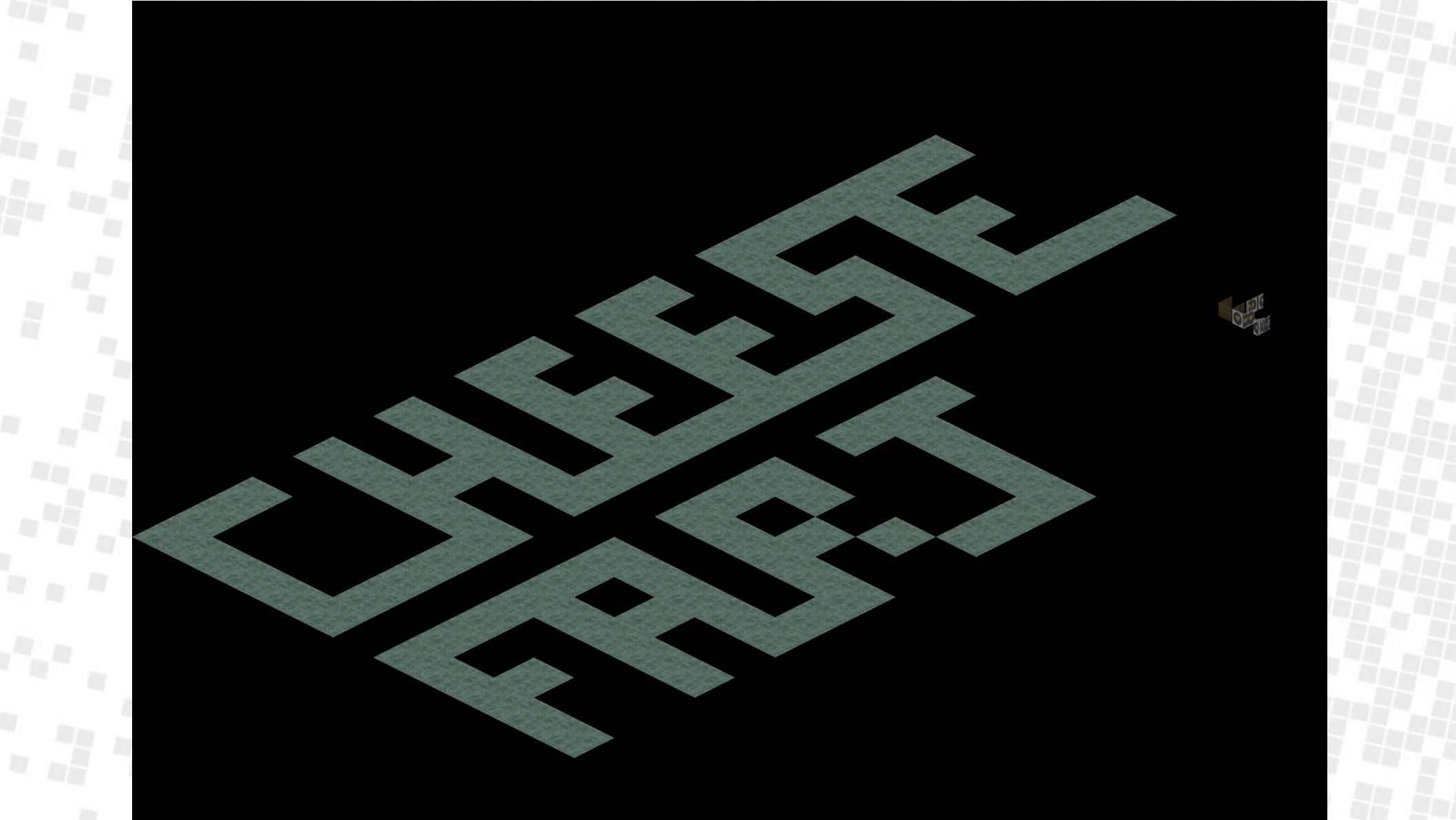
- Implement the bits that can show you if you went wrong
  - Keep in mind that some games have false-positives
  - Some files may be corrupt but unused
- The more constrained, the better.

# Crusader: No Remorse

- Render a whole level
  - Shape drawing
  - $x/y/z$  coordinate details
  - Glob unpacking
  - Typeinfo (up to a point)







# Steps beyond this:

- Try to identify headers of known file formats
  - Zlib compressed data is a common one
  - Even inside of other files
    - Can hint at other offsets to find
- Try to identify offset / size pairs, or indexes into the data
  - Write a program to check these

# Steps beyond this:

- Find files with the same format, but different data to identify what fields represent
- Try to fully identify small files or byte regions, and then find out how larger files differ
- Look for other file formats from the same era for indications on how people solved similar problems then
  - Many people in the same era will (inadvertently) choose the same kind of solution

# Live reverse engineering

- Debugging original executables
- This is illegal in some places
  - if the laws say that doing so for compatibility is legal, you can still get sued
- YMMV
- I choose not to

# Thanks to

- Moritz Mertinkat and Gavin Pugh
  - For reverse-engineering Red Alert and Command&Conquer and pulling me into reverse engineering

# Thanks to

- Origin, Jason Ely, Eric Willmar and the whole Crusader team
  - For making the awesome game that crashed on my computer, and that pulled me into C++

# Thanks to

- [Echosector.com](http://Echosector.com)
- Stauff for doing most of the work already & implementing it in ScummVM
- Keenan for keeping the site and community running for so long



Questions?



This was  
What's in a bit