This lecture notes are provided as a supplement to the textbook. The notes are very terse, and you should first read the relevant sections from the book. (Sections 1.1 and 1.2 from Chapter 1.) Then refer to these notes as a brief summary of the notation and definitions used in class to describe finite state automata and computations. Notice that the definition of DFAs and NFAs is identical as the one given in the book. The only difference here is in the style used to define computations.

1 DFAs

A Deterministic Finite Automaton (DFA) is a 5-tuple $M = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, s, F)$ consisting of

1. A finite set of states $Q$
2. Finite set of input symbols $\Sigma$
3. A transition function $\delta : Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$
4. A start state $s \in Q$
5. A set of accepting states $F \subseteq Q$

A DFA takes an input string $w$ over the alphabet $\Sigma$, and either accepts or rejects the string. Identifying acceptance with the value 1 and rejection with 0, one can think of the DFA as a machine that takes a string $w$ as input, and outputs a single bit $b \in \{0, 1\}$.

1.1 Modeling computation as a function from the input to the output

The computation performed by the automaton can be defined in several ways. The simplest approach is to model the computation as a function $f_M : \Sigma^* \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ mapping the input string $w \in \Sigma^*$ to the output bit $f_M(w) \in \{0, 1\}$. Here $\Sigma^*$ is the standard notation (used in Section 1.3 of the textbook) to represent the set of all strings over the alphabet $\Sigma$, i.e., the set of all finite sequences of 0,1 or more elements from $\Sigma$. The empty string (i.e., the sequence of length 0) is represented by a special symbol $\epsilon$. The function $f_M$ can be formally defined as follows. First extend the transition function $\delta : Q \times \Sigma \rightarrow Q$ to a function $\delta^* : Q \times \Sigma^* \rightarrow Q$. The difference between $\delta$ and $\delta^*$ is that $\delta^*$ takes not just a symbol, but an entire string as its second argument.

We let $\delta^*(q,w)$ be the state reached by the DFA when starting in state $q$ and consuming the string $w$ from the input. This extended transition function is defined by induction on (the length of) the second argument according to the rules

- (Base case: $|\epsilon| = 0$): $\delta^*(q, \epsilon) = q$, for every $q \in Q$
- (Inductive case: $|aw| \geq 1$): $\delta^*(q, aw) = \delta^*(\delta(q,a), w)$, for all $q \in Q, a \in \Sigma$ and $w \in \Sigma^*$.

As discussed in class, this is an inductive definition, not an inductive proof. If you are unfamiliar with inductive definitions, just think of it as the definition of a recursive program to compute $\delta^*$. Using the extended transition function, the function computed by the automaton is defined as

$$f_M(w) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } \delta^*(s, w) \notin F \\ 1 & \text{if } \delta^*(s, w) \in F \end{cases}$$
1.2 Modeling computation as a transition system

Sometime one needs a more detailed description of the computation than the one provided by the input/output function $f_M$. For example, the function describing the input/output mapping of a program $P$, does not provide information about the running time of $P$. (In the case of DFAs this is not much of a loss because the number of steps executed by the program is always equal to the length of the input, but for NFAs and more complex models of computation this is not generally true.) Alternatively, one can model the computations of a DFA $M = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, s, F)$ using a more operational style as follows:

1. First one defines a set $C = Q \times \Sigma^*$ of “configurations”. A configuration represents a snapshot of the system during an execution, including its internal storage, input, etc. or whatever is relevant to carry out the computation one step at a time. In our case, a configuration $(q, u)$ represents the current state of the automaton $q \in Q$, and the portion of the input $u \in \Sigma^*$ that still needs to be consumed.

2. A function $I : \Sigma^* \rightarrow C$ mapping the input string to a corresponding initial configuration. In our case, $I(w) = (s, w)$ maps the input string $w$ to the configuration consisting of the initial state of the automaton $s \in Q$ and the whole input string $w \in \Sigma^*$.

3. A transition relation $R \subseteq C \times C$ consisting of all pairs $(c, c')$ such that the system can go from configuration $c$ to configuration $c'$ in one execution step. The condition $(c, c') \in R$ is usually written as $c \rightarrow_R c'$. A configuration $c$ is called final if there exists no $c' \in C$ such that $c \rightarrow_R c'$. The transition relation of a DFA is the set of all pairs $(q, au) \rightarrow_R (\delta(q, a), u)$ where $q \in Q$, $a \in \Sigma$ and $u \in \Sigma^*$. In other words, the automaton can go from state $q$ and a nonempty input $au$ with first symbol $a$, to the new state $\delta(q, a)$ while keeping the remaining portion of the input $u$. It is easy to see that the final configurations for this transition relation are precisely those of the form $(q, \epsilon)$, where there is no more input to be consumed.

4. An output function $O : C \rightarrow V$ mapping the final configurations (at the end of the computation) to an output value. In the case of a DFA, the output is in $V = \{0, 1\}$ and the output function is defined as $O(q, \epsilon) = 1$ if $(q \in F)$ then 1 else 0.

A computation on input $w \in \Sigma^*$ is then defined as a sequence of configurations $c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_n$ such that

1. $c_1 = I(w)$ is the initial configuration
2. $c_i \rightarrow_R c_{i+1}$ for all $i = 1, \ldots, n - 1$
3. $c_n$ is a final configuration, i.e., there is no $c \in C$ such that $c_n \rightarrow_R c$

The output of the computation is the value $O(c_n)$. A computation can also be infinite, in which case the sequence $c_1, c_2, \ldots$ extends indefinitely, and condition (3) on the last configuration being final is omitted.

The state transition system associated to a DFA is deterministic, i.e., for any configuration $c \in C$, there is at most one possible “next” configuration $c'$ such that $c \rightarrow_R c'$. If this is the case, for any input $w \in \Sigma^*$ there is precisely one computation of $M$ on input $w$, and (if the computation is finite, which is always the case for DFAs) one output value $O(c_n)$. So, from the definition of computation we can recover a function $f_M$ mapping the input string $w$ to the output value $f_M(w) = O(c_n)$. However, the computation (defined as a sequence of configurations $c_1, \ldots, c_n$ provides additional information. For example, the length $n$ of the computation measures the “running time” of the program, measured as the number of transitions followed to go from the initial configuration $I(w)$ to the final configuration $c_n = (q, \epsilon)$. This is not very interesting in the case of DFAs because $n = |w|$ is always equal to the length of the initial input string.
A Nondeterministic Finite Automaton (NFA) is a 5-tuple $M = (Q, \Sigma, \delta, s, F)$ consisting of
1. A finite set of states $Q$
2. Finite set of input symbols $\Sigma$
3. A transition function $\delta : Q \times (\Sigma \cup \{\epsilon\}) \rightarrow \mathcal{P}(Q)$
4. A start state $s \in Q$
5. A set of accepting states $F \subseteq Q$

Notice that the only difference between a DFA and an NFA is in the transition function $\delta$. This is exactly the same as the definition of NFA given in the textbook. We proceed to define its computations using the same style as for DFAs.

### 2.1 Modeling computation as a transition system

The set of configurations $C = Q \times \Sigma^*$ and initial configurations $I(w) = (s, w)$ are the same as for DFAs. The output function

- $O(q, w) = 1$ if $(q \in F) \land (w = \epsilon)$ then 0 else

is slightly different because NFA computations can terminate without reading the whole input string. The transition relation contains all transitions of the form

- $(q, xu) \rightarrow_R (q', u)$ where $q \in Q$, $x \in \Sigma \cup \{\epsilon\}$, $u \in \Sigma^*$ and $q' \in \delta(q, x)$.

Notice that when $x = \epsilon$, we have $xu = u$ and the transition does not modify the second component of the configuration. The transition system associated to an NFA is nondeterministic: for each input string, there are in general several possible computations, and several corresponding output values. Also, some computations can be infinite, e.g., if there is a loop consisting of $\epsilon$-transitions. By convention, the set of strings accepted by an NFA is defined as the set of strings $w$ such that there is a computation $c_1 = I(w) \rightarrow c_1 \rightarrow c_2 \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow c_n$ that outputs $O(c_n) = 1$. As discussed in the textbook, this is not a realistic model of computation, but it can be useful in studying the power and properties of (more realistic) deterministic finite automata.

### 2.2 Modeling computation as a function

As for the DFA, computations can also be simply defined by a function mapping inputs to outputs. As before, we start by extending the transition function $\delta$ of an NFA, to a function of type $\delta^* : Q \times \Sigma^* \rightarrow \mathcal{P}(Q)$ which takes a string as its second argument. The function $\delta^*$ is defined by induction on the length of the second argument according to the rules

1. $\delta^*(q, \epsilon)$ is the set of states $q' \in Q$ that can be reached from $q$ following a sequence of 0 or more $\epsilon$-transitions, i.e., there is a sequence of $n \geq 0$ states $q_1, \ldots, q_n$ where $q = q_1$, $q' = q_n$ and $q_{i+1} \in \delta(q_i, \epsilon)$ for all $i$.

2. $\delta^*(q, au) = \bigcup_{p \in \delta^*(q, \epsilon)} \bigcup_{r \in \delta(p, a)} \delta^*(r, u)$, i.e., all states that can be reached from $q$ by first following a sequence of $\epsilon$-transitions, then reading $a$ from the input, and finally reading the rest of the input $u$.

Given an input string $w$, the function $\delta^*(s, w)$ returns not just one state, but the set of all possible states that can be reached starting from $q$ and reading $w$ from the input. The NFA accepts $w$ if $\delta^*(s, w) \cap F \neq \emptyset$, i.e., if it is possible to reach a state in $F$, starting from $s$ and reading $w$ from the input. Formally, the function computed by an NFA $M$ is defined as $f_M(w) = 1$ if $(\delta^*(s, w) \cap F) \neq \emptyset$ and 0 else.