

# INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

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# WHO AM I

## AND SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE COURSE

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Mixed: 50% online  
and 50% in-person

Fully online

Information retrieval & data visualisation

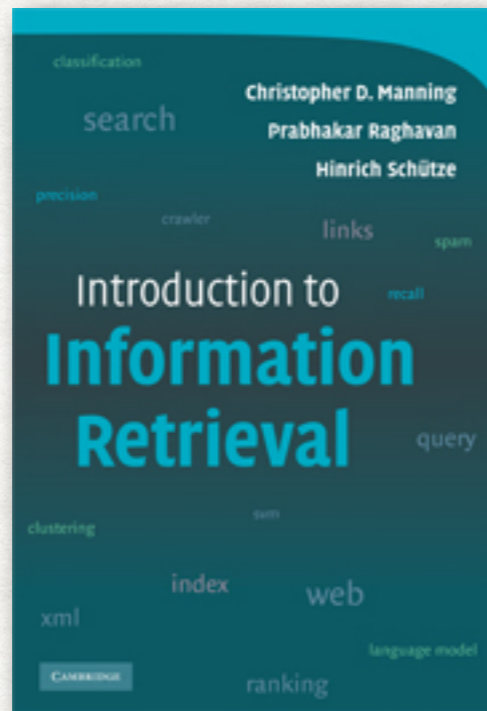
Luca Manzoni  
October and November

Tea Tušar  
November and December

All the material of the course will be available online on Moodle



# BOOK



Christopher D. Manning  
Prabhakar Raghavan  
Hinrich Schütze

**Introduction to Information Retrieval**  
Cambridge University Press. 2008.

Freely available at: <https://nlp.stanford.edu/IR-book/>



# THE EXAM (1)

## How

Project + presentation of the project (with questions)

## When

Mid December (we can discuss to fix a day).

The projects will be assigned in November

**Is the project the same for everybody?**

No, each student will have a different project

**How can we select a project?**

There will be a selection of project to choose from  
or you can propose your own



# THE EXAM (2)

**What kind of project?**

Code or report (approx. 10 pages)

**Can I use language X?**

Generally yes, but please ask if it is not in the following list:  
Python, C, C++, Java, R, Julia, Common Lisp, Clojure, Haskell

**I want to do a project on X**

We can discuss and prepare a personalised  
project on X

**How is the final mark computed?**

It is the average of the marks in the two parts



# OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

## INFORMATION RETRIEVAL PART

- Introduction to information retrieval (IR)
- Data structures for IR
- Models for IR:
  - Boolean
  - Vector space
  - Probabilistic
- Evaluation of IR
- IR on the Web
- Recommender Systems



Information Retrieval (IR) is  
finding material (usually documents)  
of an unstructured nature (usually text)  
that satisfies an information need  
from within large collections  
(usually stored on computers)

*Manning, Raghavan, Schütze*  
*Introduction to Information Retrieval*



(IR) part of computer science which studies the retrieval of **information** (not data) from a **collection of written documents**. The retrieved documents aim at satisfying a **user information need** usually expressed in natural language.

*Baeza-Yates, Ribeiro-Neto  
Modern Information Retrieval*



# EXAMPLES OF INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

- Web search
- Searching emails in your email client
- Searching documents using  
Spotlight/Windows Desktop Search/Tracker/Nepomuk
- Search inside a knowledge base



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF IR

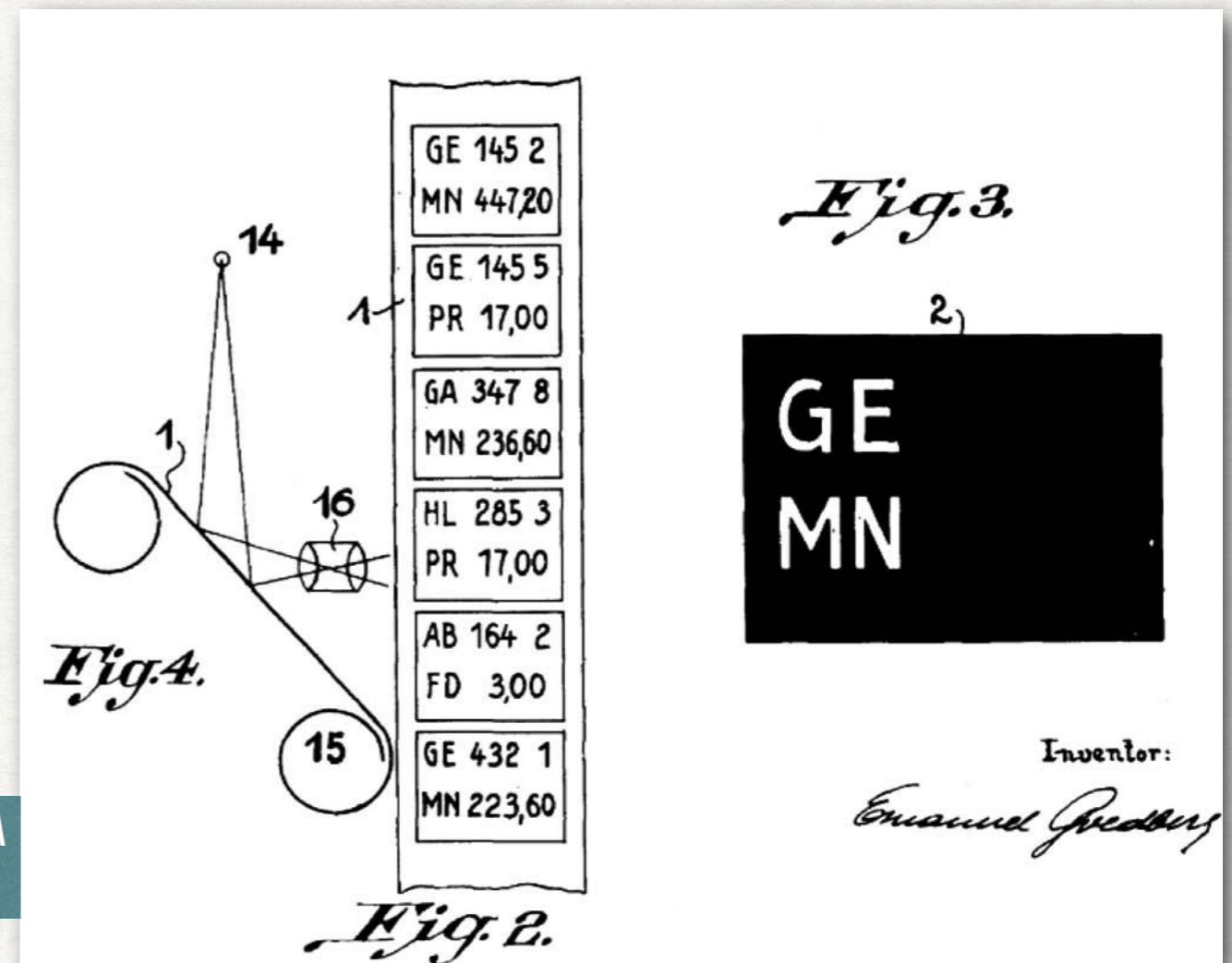
## BEFORE COMPUTERS

The origin of IR is in the cataloguing of books in libraries

Each books has one or more topics associated to it

Multiple machines were invented to help librarians in retrieving books

MACHINE FOR RETRIEVAL BASED ON MICROFILM AND A PHOTOCELL. GOLDBERG, 1931



Sanderson, Mark, and W. Bruce Croft.

"The history of information retrieval research."

Proceedings of the IEEE 100.Special Centennial Issue (2012): 1444-1451.



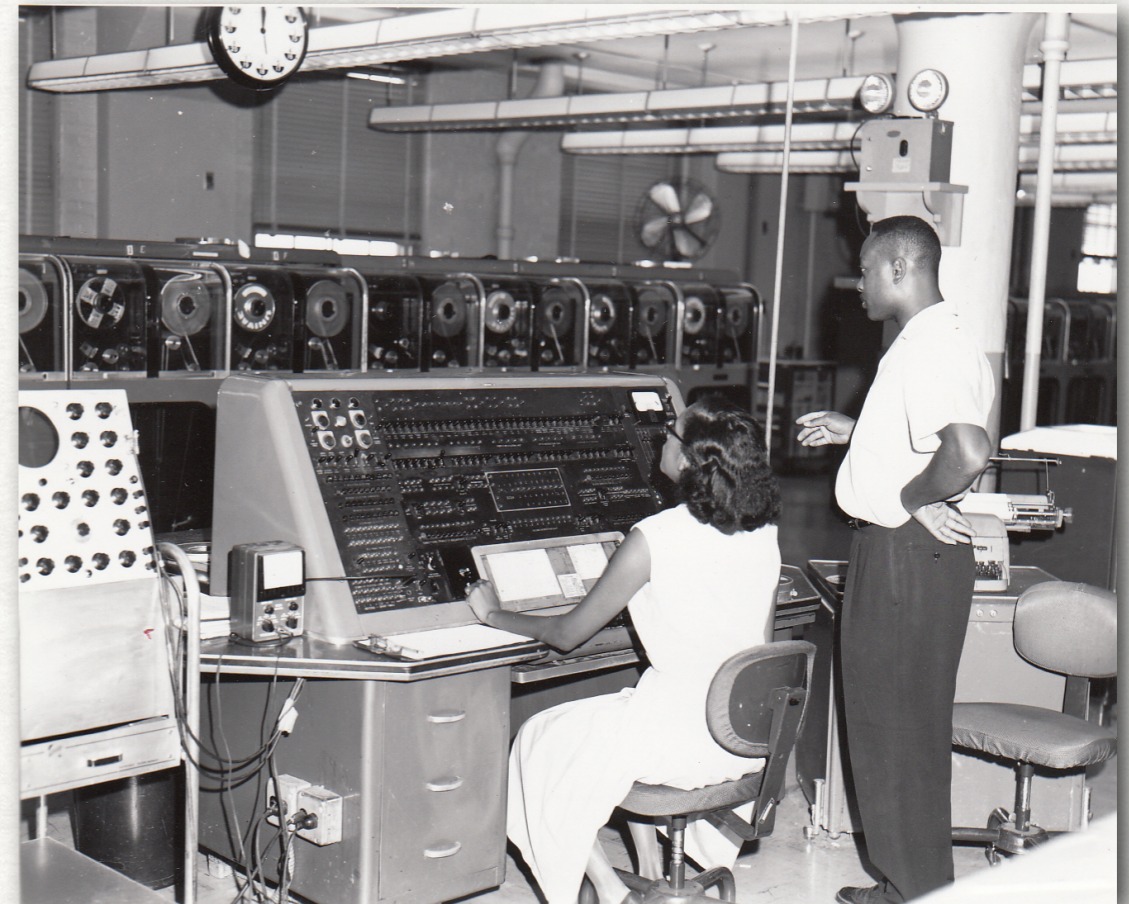
# A BRIEF HISTORY OF IR

## EARLY USE OF COMPUTERS

The use of computer allowed to speed up the traditional search methods, like searching across  $10^6$  records in 15 hours using a UNIVAC computer

But new techniques were also being developed:

First move to indexing based on words instead of assigning topics to document (*Uniterm system, 1952*)



How to rank the results: position based on the frequency of the words in the documents (*term frequency weighting, 1958*)



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF IR

## PRE-INTERNET ('60–EARLY '90)

**Clustering** of documents  
with similar contents

Representing documents as vectors:  
the **vector space mode**

**Relevance feedback:**  
the user feedback can be used  
to improve the query results

First private companies focused  
on information retrieval

**tf-idf:** less common words tend  
to refer to more specific concepts,  
which were more important in retrieval

Text REtrieval Conference (**TREC**)



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF IR

## WEB SEARCH

1993: ~100 websites

2019: ~2 billions websites

Instead of using an authoritative source  
now the web must be scraped to get information

The links between the pages  
are a source of additional information



Altavista:  
first fully-searchable  
index of the web (1995)



Google:  
currently the most used  
web search engine (1997)



# SOME TERMINOLOGY

## DOCUMENTS AND COLLECTIONS

- **Document:** individual unit on which we build an IR system
  - Books, chapters, webpages, scientific papers, etc.
  - Images, videos, Music, etc.
- **Collection (also called Corpus):** the group of documents on which we perform the search
  - All Shakespeare plays, the emails in your mailbox, all the products on an online shop, the web
  - Some collections are static, while others are dynamic



# PROPERTIES OF UNSTRUCTURED DOCUMENTS

## DOCUMENT

- Significant text contents
- Some structure might be present (e.g., title, author)
- The semantics of the document is not well-defined
- Example query:  
*"find all stories about holidays in Ireland"*

## DATABASE RECORD

- Predefined structure
- Usually the semantics of the fields is well defined
- Finding matches is (usually) done by comparing specific fields
- Example Query: *"select all products that cost at most 50€"*



# SOME TERMINOLOGY (2)

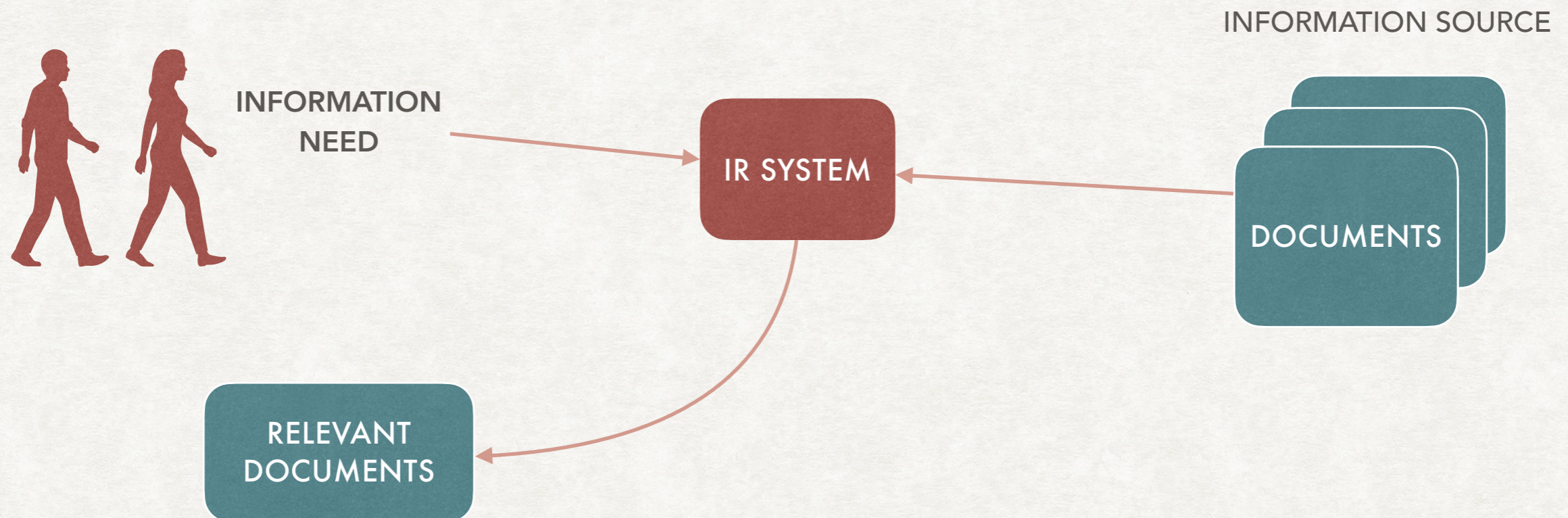
## FROM INFORMATION NEED TO QUERIES

- **Information need:** a topic about which the user what to know more
- **Query:** the way the user formulate his/her information need to the IR system
  - For the same information need the users might formulate different queries
  - E.g., what query would you use to know which is the current record holder in Tetris?



# GOAL OF AN IR SYSTEM

An IR System must interpret the information needs of the user and estimate the relevance of the documents with respect to it.

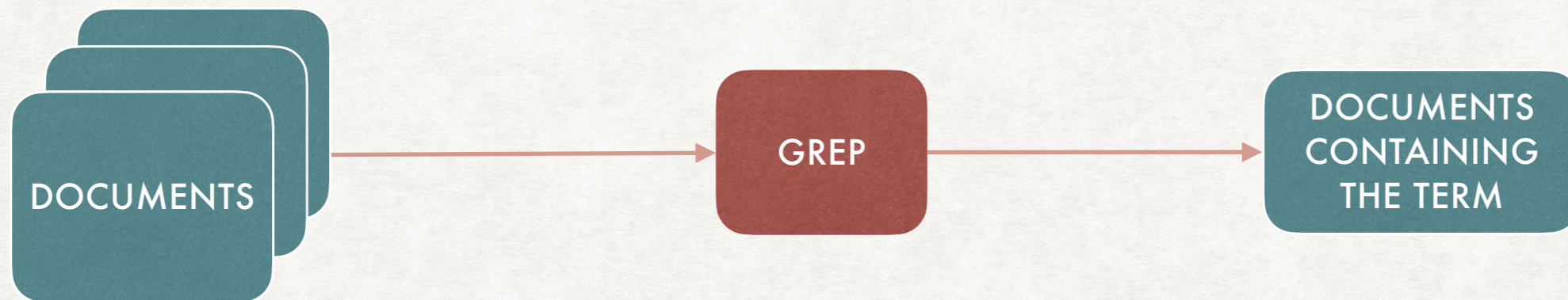




# IS AN IR SYSTEM JUST "GREP"?

HINT: NO

```
> grep term_to_search corpus
```



- Searching across all the text does not scale to large collections
- We might want a more flexible query language
- We might want *ranked* retrieval (i.e., more relevant documents first)



# INDEXING

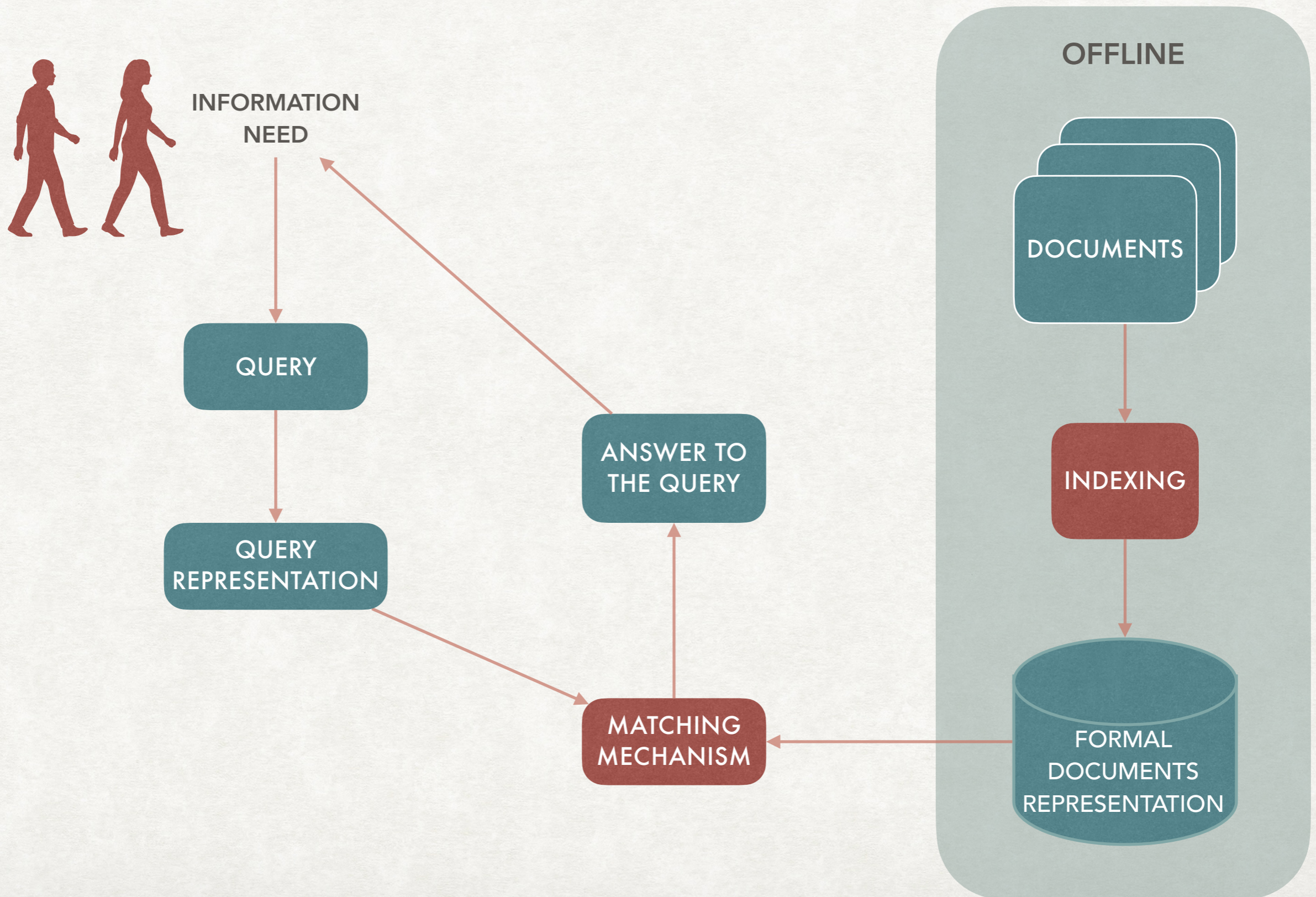
## HOW TO AVOID GREPPING

- It is unfeasible to scan the entire corpus for each query...
- ...therefore, the corpus is scanned once\* and an **index** is built
- An index will have for each **term** (e.g., a word) all documents containing that term
- In this way we can avoid a linear scan of all documents

\*assuming it never changes



# STRUCTURE OF AN IR SYSTEM





# MAIN COMPONENTS

A FORMAL REPRESENTATION  
OF THE QUERIES

**Exact matching**  
The document is either  
relevant or not relevant

A WAY OF MATCHING  
THE QUERY AND DOCUMENTS REPRESENTATIONS  
AND A WAY TO MEASURE RELEVANCE

**Partial matching**  
The document that are  
"sufficiently similar"  
to the query are recovered

A FORMAL REPRESENTATION  
OF THE DOCUMENTS



# DIFFERENT KINDS OF REPRESENTATIONS

## QUERIES AND DOCUMENTS

### Query

BOOLEAN  
FORMULAE

+ EXTENSIONS

cat AND dogs

FREE FORM QUERIES

common house pets

IMAGES



### Document

SET OF TERMS

POINT IN  
A VECTOR SPACE

BINARY VECTOR



# THE TWO ASPECTS OF IR

We need to manage technical and a semantic aspects

## Technical aspects

- How to represent information in a computer?
- How to retrieve the information fast enough?

↓  
**EFFICIENCY**

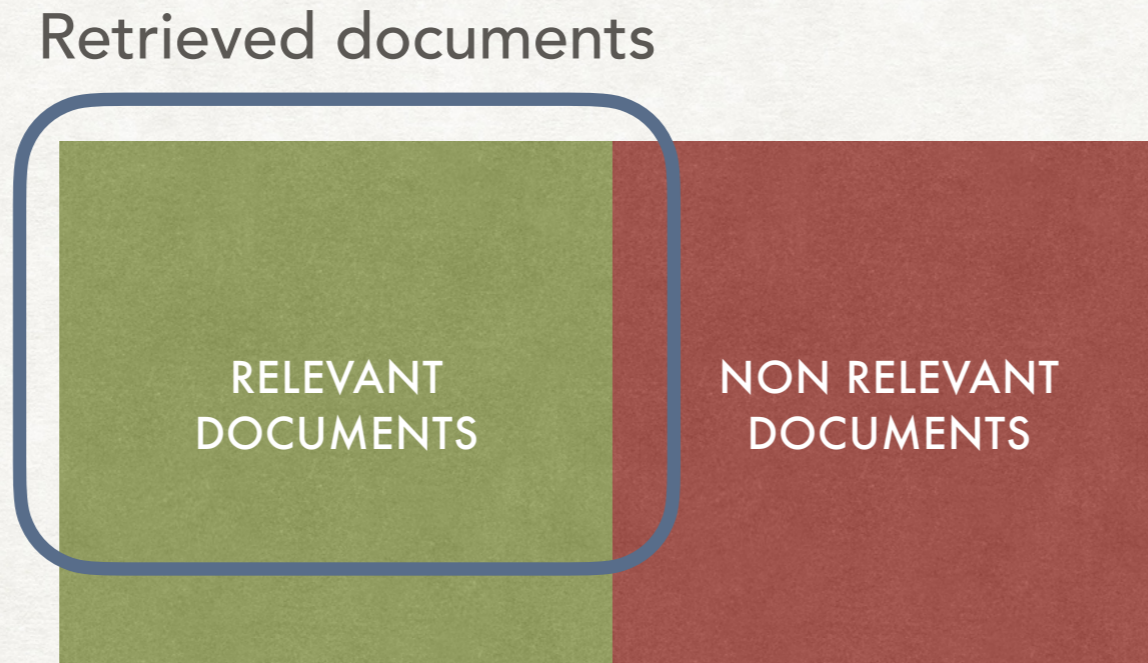
## Semantic aspects

- How can we store information in a way that preserves its meaning?
- How can we retrieve the relevant documents?

↓  
**EFFECTIVENESS**



# MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS



$$\text{precision} = \frac{\text{relevant} \cap \text{retrieved}}{\text{retrieved}}$$

Which fraction  
of the retrieved documents  
is relevant

$$\text{recall} = \frac{\text{relevant} \cap \text{retrieved}}{\text{relevant}}$$

Which fraction  
of the relevant documents  
has been retrieved



# BOOLEAN RETRIEVAL



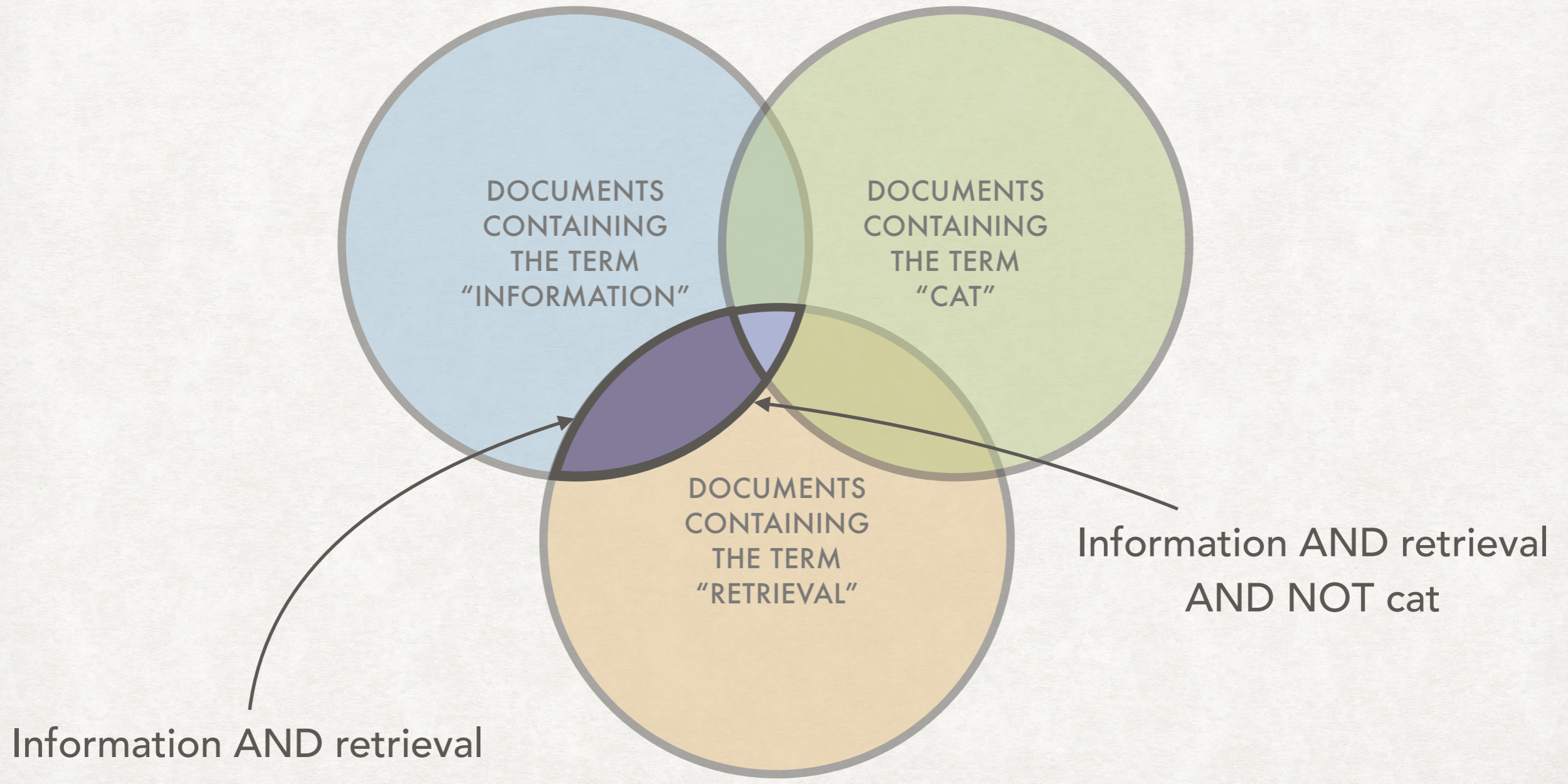
# WHAT IS BOOLEAN RETRIEVAL?

- Only exact matching: either a document is relevant or not
- The query is expressed like a Boolean formula:
  - E.g., (dog OR cat) AND box
- We can ask for the inclusion (or exclusion) of certain terms
- Going forward, we can decide to extend this model to allow more powerful queries
- For now we ignore the issue of ranking the results according to relevance.



# A VISUAL EXAMPLE

## BOOLEAN QUERIES AND SETS





# LINKING BOOLEAN QUERIES AND SETS

$$d_1 = \{t_1, t_3, t_4\}$$

$$d_2 = \{t_1, t_2, t_5\}$$

$$d_3 = \{t_2, t_3, t_5\}$$

Documents  
as sets of terms

$$t_1 = \{d_1, d_2\}$$

$$t_2 = \{d_2, d_3\}$$

$$t_3 = \{d_1, d_3\}$$

$$t_4 = \{d_1\}$$

$$t_5 = \{d_2, d_3\}$$

Terms as sets  
of documents

Queries

Answers

$$q_1 = t_2 \longrightarrow \{d_2, d_3\}$$

$$q_2 = t_2 \wedge t_3 \longrightarrow \{d_2, d_3\} \cap \{d_1, d_3\} = \{d_3\}$$

$$q_3 = t_2 \vee t_3 \longrightarrow \{d_2, d_3\} \cup \{d_1, d_3\} = \{d_1, d_2, d_3\}$$



# HOW TO ASSOCIATE DOCUMENTS AND TERMS

Let us consider as a corpus a set of ~400 articles from "Time"<sup>1</sup> in the '60s:

0. THE ALLIES AFTER NASSAU IN DECEMBER 1960, THE U.S. FIRST [...]
1. RUSSIA WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE ? IT WAS IN 1954 THAT NIKITA [...]
2. BERLIN ONE LAST RUN HANS WEIDNER HAD BEEN HOPING FOR MONTHS TO [...]
3. THE ROAD TO JAIL IS PAVED WITH NONOBJECTIVE ART SINCE THE [...]
- ... ..

We can build an incidence matrix of documents and terms

<sup>1</sup> Available at [http://ir.dcs.gla.ac.uk/resources/test\\_collections/time/](http://ir.dcs.gla.ac.uk/resources/test_collections/time/)



# THE INCIDENCE MATRIX

	Article 0	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3	Article 4	Article 5
A	1	1	1	1	1	1
AACHEN	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABABA	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABABAS	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABACK	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABADAN	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABANDON	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABANDONED	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABANDONING	0	0	0	0	0	0
ABANDONMENT	0	0	0	0	0	0

...and another 22484 rows



# INCIDENCE MATRIX

## STORAGE REQUIREMENTS

The size needed to store an incidence matrix is  $\#terms \times \#documents$

Hence the size requirements make this data structure impractical

### A simple example

The Oxford English Dictionary has over 171000 words in common use

In 2019 the English Wikipedia contains over  $5.9 \times 10^6$  articles

The resulting incidence matrix would have more than  $10^{12}$  entries







# THE INVERTED INDEX

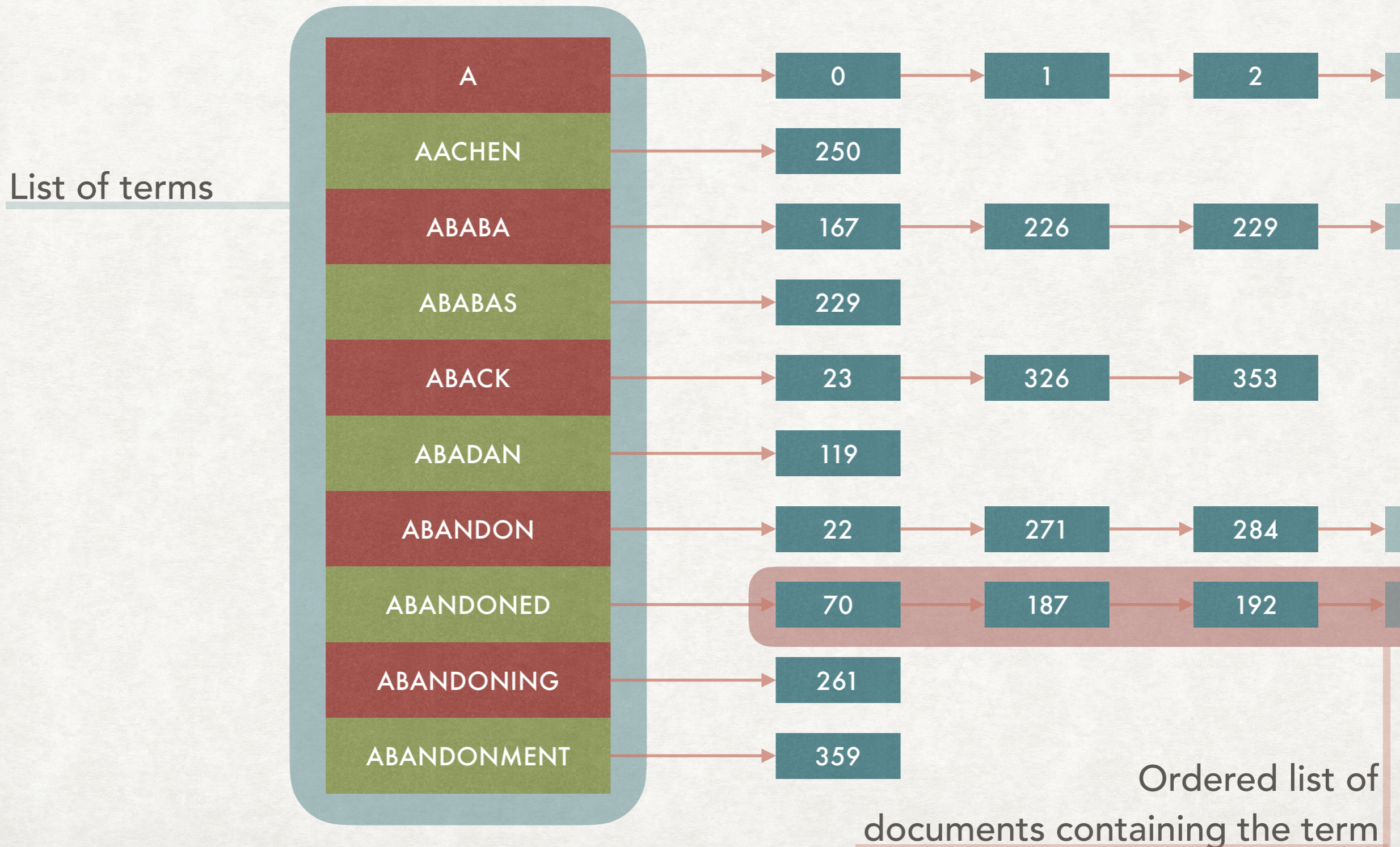
## A MORE COMPACT DATA STRUCTURE

- We want to avoid storing rows that will be mostly empty
- We store, for each term, the list of documents containing it
- This is similar to the difference between adjacency *matrices* and adjacency *lists* for graphs.
- We keep the list ordered to improve performances for union and intersection
- Why **inverted** index? Because it is not from documents to terms but from terms to documents. Apart from that, it is a "normal" index



# THE INVERTED INDEX

## A VISUAL REPRESENTATION





# SOME TERMINOLOGY (3)

## THIS TIME FOR INVERTED INDICES

- **DocID** (Document Identifier): a unique number associated to a document. E.g., consecutive integers.
- **Dictionary**: the collection of all terms that we have in the inverted index
- **Posting list**: list of DocIDs associated to a term
- **Posting**: element of the list (different from a simple DocID because it is associated to a term)



# BUILDING AN INVERTED INDEX

## SORTING AND GROUPING

- For each document we extract the sequence of terms
- We tag each term with the corresponding DocID
- We sort the list of terms extracted from all the documents
- We group together equal terms and we “merge” the posting lists of the two terms



# EXAMPLE OF SORTING AND GROUPING

Document 1: the cat is inside the box

Document 2: the dog is barking at the box

the	1	at	2	at	2
cat	1	barking	2	barking	2
is	1	box	1	box	1,2
inside	1	box	2	cat	1
the	1	cat	1	dog	2
box	1	dog	2	inside	1
the	2	inside	1	is	1,2
dog	2	is	1	the	1,2
is	2	is	2		
barking	2	the	1		
at	2	the	1		
the	2	the	2		
box	2	the	2		



# WHAT ABOUT THE SPACE REQUIREMENTS?

## WORST-CASE BOUNDS AND THE REAL WORLD

- But... the space occupied by an inverted index is not necessarily lower than the one of the incidence matrix.
- In the worst case (each document contains all the terms) they both occupy  $O(\text{\#terms} \times \text{\#documents})$  space.
- In practice most document contains only a small subset of the terms.
- The same reasoning applies to the time complexity of the operations (intersection and union) performed on the set of documents.