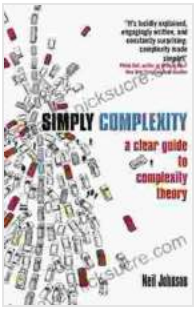
Simply Complexity: A Clear Guide to Complexity Theory

Complexity theory is a branch of mathematics that studies the complexity of algorithms and problems. It is a vast and complex field, but this guide will provide you with a clear and concise overview of the most important concepts.



Simply Complexity: A Clear Guide to Complexity Theory by Mary Beth Leatherdale

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What is Complexity Theory?

Complexity theory is concerned with the amount of time and space required to solve a problem. It is important because it can help us to understand the limits of what computers can do. For example, complexity theory can tell us which problems are easy to solve (such as finding the minimum of a list of numbers) and which problems are hard to solve (such as finding the prime factors of a large number).

Measuring Complexity

The complexity of an algorithm is typically measured in terms of its time complexity and space complexity.

- **Time complexity** measures the amount of time required to run the algorithm. It is typically expressed in terms of the number of steps required to complete the algorithm.
- **Space complexity** measures the amount of memory required to run the algorithm. It is typically expressed in terms of the number of bits required to store the input and output of the algorithm.

Classifying Problems

Complexity theory can be used to classify problems into different classes. The most common classes are:

- **P**: The class of problems that can be solved in polynomial time. This means that the time complexity of the algorithm is bounded by a polynomial function of the input size.
- **NP**: The class of problems that can be verified in polynomial time. This means that there is a polynomial-time algorithm that can check whether a given solution to a problem is correct.
- **NP-complete**: The class of problems that are both in NP and are as hard as any other problem in NP. This means that if any NP-complete problem can be solved in polynomial time, then all problems in NP can be solved in polynomial time.

P vs NP

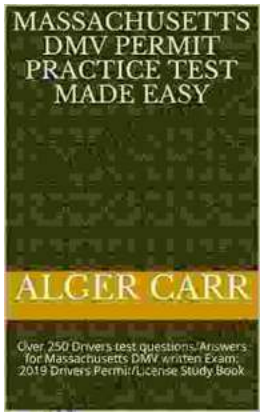
One of the most famous unsolved problems in computer science is the P vs NP problem. This problem asks whether every problem in NP can be

solved in polynomial time. If the answer to this problem is yes, then it would mean that all NP-complete problems can be solved efficiently. However, if the answer to this problem is no, then it would mean that there are some problems that cannot be solved efficiently.

Complexity theory is a vast and complex field, but it is also a fascinating one. It can help us to understand the limits of what computers can do and to design more efficient algorithms. This guide has provided you with a clear and concise overview of the most important concepts in complexity theory. For more information, you can consult the references below.

References

- Complexity theory on Wikipedia
- Complexity theory lecture notes from Princeton University
- Design and analysis of algorithms lecture notes from MIT



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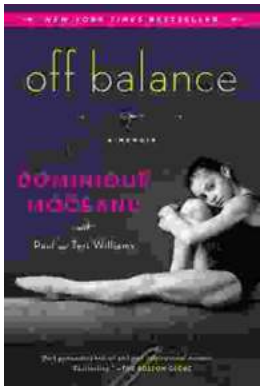

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