What is Question Answering?
Question Answering

One of the oldest NLP tasks (punched card systems in 1961)

Question: What do worms eat?

Potential Answers:

- Worms eat grass
- Horses with worms eat grass
- Birds eat worms
- Grass is eaten by worms

Simmons, Klein, McConlogue. 1964. Indexing and Dependency Logic for Answering English Questions. American Documentation 15:30, 196-204
Question Answering: IBM’s Watson

- Won Jeopardy on February 16, 2011!

William Wilkinson’s “An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia” inspired this author’s most famous novel.
Apple’s Siri

“Do I need an umbrella tomorrow in San Francisco”

Yes, San Francisco should get rain tomorrow:
### Input interpretation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pie</th>
<th>amount</th>
<th>2 slices</th>
<th>total calories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
<td>banana cream</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Average result:

702 Cal (dietary Calories)
Types of Questions in Modern Systems

- **Factoid questions**
  - Who wrote “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights”?
  - How many calories are there in two slices of apple pie?
  - What is the average age of the onset of autism?
  - Where is Apple Computer based?

- **Complex (narrative) questions**:
  - In children with an acute febrile illness, what is the efficacy of acetaminophen in reducing fever?
  - What do scholars think about Jefferson’s position on dealing with pirates?
### Commercial systems: mainly factoid questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where is the Louvre Museum located?</td>
<td>In Paris, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the abbreviation for limited partnership?</td>
<td>L.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the names of Odin’s ravens?</td>
<td>Huginn and Muninn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What currency is used in China?</td>
<td>The yuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of nuts are used in marzipan?</td>
<td>almonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What instrument does Max Roach play?</td>
<td>drums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the telephone number for Stanford University?</td>
<td>650-723-2300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paradigms for QA

- IR-based approaches
  - TREC; IBM Watson; Google
- Knowledge-based and Hybrid approaches
  - IBM Watson; Apple Siri; Wolfram Alpha; True Knowledge Evi
Many questions can already be answered by web search

Google

What are the names of Odin's ravens?

Search

About 214,000 results (0.38 seconds)

Everything

Huginn and Muninn - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huginn_and_Muninn

The names of the ravens are sometimes modernly anglicized as Hugin and Munin. In the Poetic Edda, a disguised Odin expresses that he fears that they may ...

Attestations - Archaeological record - Theories - See also
IR-based Question Answering

Where is the Louvre Museum located?

Best guess for Louvre Museum Location is Paris, France
Mentioned on at least 7 websites including wikipedia.org, answers.com and east-buc.k12.ia.us - Show sources - Feedback

Musée du Louvre - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
Musée du Louvre is located in Paris. Location within Paris. Established, 1793. Location, Palais Royal, Musée du Louvre, 75001 Paris, France. Type, Art museum ...
Louvre Palace - List of works in the Louvre - Category:Musée du Louvre
IR-based Factoid QA
IR-based Factoid QA

- **QUESTION PROCESSING**
  - Detect question type, answer type, focus, relations
  - Formulate queries to send to a search engine

- **PASSAGE RETRIEVAL**
  - Retrieve ranked documents
  - Break into suitable passages and rerank

- **ANSWER PROCESSING**
  - Extract candidate answers
  - Rank candidates
    - using evidence from the text and external sources
Knowledge-based approaches (Siri)

• Build a semantic representation of the query
  • Times, dates, locations, entities, numeric quantities

• Map from this semantics to query structured data or resources
  • Geospatial databases
  • Ontologies (Wikipedia infoboxes, dbPedia, WordNet, Yago)
  • Restaurant review sources and reservation services
  • Scientific databases
Hybrid approaches (IBM Watson)

• Build a shallow semantic representation of the query
• Generate answer candidates using IR methods
  • Augmented with ontologies and semi-structured data
• Score each candidate using richer knowledge sources
  • Geospatial databases
  • Temporal reasoning
  • Taxonomical classification
What is Question Answering?
Question Answering

Answer Types and Query Formulation
Factoid Q/A

Question Processing
- Query Formulation
- Answer Type Detection

Document Retrieval

Passage Retrieval
- Relevant Docs
- Passage Retrieval
- Relevant passages

Indexing

Answer Processing

Answer
Question Processing
Things to extract from the question

- Answer Type Detection
  - Decide the **named entity type** (person, place) of the answer
- Query Formulation
  - Choose **query keywords** for the IR system
- Question Type classification
  - Is this a definition question, a math question, a list question?
- Focus Detection
  - Find the question words that are replaced by the answer
- Relation Extraction
  - Find relations between entities in the question
Question Processing

They’re the two states you could be reentering if you’re crossing Florida’s northern border

- **Answer Type:** US state
- **Query:** two states, border, Florida, north
- **Focus:** the two states
- **Relations:** borders(Florida, ?x, north)
Answer Type Detection: Named Entities

- Who founded Virgin Airlines?
  - PERSON
- What Canadian city has the largest population?
  - CITY.
Answer Type Taxonomy

Xin Li, Dan Roth. 2002. Learning Question Classifiers. COLING'02

• 6 coarse classes
  • ABBEVIATION, ENTITY, DESCRIPTION, HUMAN, LOCATION, NUMERIC

• 50 finer classes
  • LOCATION: city, country, mountain...
  • HUMAN: group, individual, title, description
  • ENTITY: animal, body, color, currency...
Part of Li & Roth’s Answer Type Taxonomy

- LOCATION
  - country
  - city
  - state

- DESCRIPTION
  - reason
  - definition
  - food
  - currency
  - animal
  - date
  - percent
  - distance

- NUMERIC
  - money
  - size

- ABBREVIATION
  - expression
  - abbreviation
  - individual
  - title
  - group
## Answer Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENTITY</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>animal</td>
<td>What are the names of Odin’s ravens?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>body</td>
<td>What part of your body contains the corpus callosum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>color</td>
<td>What colors make up a rainbow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative</td>
<td>In what book can I find the story of Aladdin?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>currency</td>
<td>What currency is used in China?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disease/medicine</td>
<td>What does Salk vaccine prevent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>event</td>
<td>What war involved the battle of Chapultepec?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food</td>
<td>What kind of nuts are used in marzipan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instrument</td>
<td>What instrument does Max Roach play?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lang</td>
<td>What’s the official language of Algeria?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>letter</td>
<td>What letter appears on the cold-water tap in Spain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>What is the name of King Arthur’s sword?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plant</td>
<td>What are some fragrant white climbing roses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>product</td>
<td>What is the fastest computer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religion</td>
<td>What religion has the most members?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sport</td>
<td>What was the name of the ball game played by the Mayans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>substance</td>
<td>What fuel do airplanes use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>symbol</td>
<td>What is the chemical symbol for nitrogen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technique</td>
<td>What is the best way to remove wallpaper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>term</td>
<td>How do you say “Grandma” in Irish?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vehicle</td>
<td>What was the name of Captain Bligh’s ship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word</td>
<td>What’s the singular of dice?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### More Answer Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HUMAN</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>description</td>
<td>Who was Confucius?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group</td>
<td>What are the major companies that are part of Dow Jones?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ind</td>
<td>Who was the first Russian astronaut to do a spacewalk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>title</td>
<td>What was Queen Victoria’s title regarding India?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOCATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>city</td>
<td>What’s the oldest capital city in the Americas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country</td>
<td>What country borders the most others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mountain</td>
<td>What is the highest peak in Africa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>What river runs through Liverpool?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state</td>
<td>What states do not have state income tax?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NUMERIC</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>code</td>
<td>What is the telephone number for the University of Colorado?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>count</td>
<td>About how many soldiers died in World War II?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>date</td>
<td>What is the date of Boxing Day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distance</td>
<td>How long was Mao’s 1930s Long March?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>money</td>
<td>How much did a McDonald’s hamburger cost in 1963?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order</td>
<td>Where does Shanghai rank among world cities in population?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>What is the population of Mexico?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>period</td>
<td>What was the average life expectancy during the Stone Age?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percent</td>
<td>What fraction of a beaver’s life is spent swimming?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speed</td>
<td>What is the speed of the Mississippi River?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temp</td>
<td>How fast must a spacecraft travel to escape Earth’s gravity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>size</td>
<td>What is the size of Argentina?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weight</td>
<td>How many pounds are there in a stone?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Answer types in Jeopardy


- 2500 answer types in 20,000 Jeopardy question sample
- The most frequent 200 answer types cover < 50% of data
- The 40 most frequent Jeopardy answer types
  - he, country, city, man, film, state, she, author, group, here, company, president, capital, star, novel, character, woman, river, island, king, song, part, series, sport, singer, actor, play, team, show, actress, animal, presidential, composer, musical, nation, book, title, leader, game
Answer Type Detection

- Hand-written rules
- Machine Learning
- Hybrids
Answer Type Detection

• Regular expression-based rules can get some cases:
  • Who {is|was|are|were} PERSON
  • PERSON (YEAR – YEAR)

• Other rules use the question headword:
  (the headword of the first noun phrase after the wh-word)

  • Which city in China has the largest number of foreign financial companies?
  • What is the state flower of California?
Answer Type Detection

• Most often, we treat the problem as machine learning classification
  • **Define** a taxonomy of question types
  • **Annotate** training data for each question type
  • **Train** classifiers for each question class using a rich set of features.
    • features include those hand-written rules!
Features for Answer Type Detection

- Question words and phrases
- Part-of-speech tags
- Parse features (headwords)
- Named Entities
- Semantically related words
Factoid Q/A
Keyword Selection Algorithm

1. Select all non-stop words in quotations
2. Select all NNP words in recognized named entities
3. Select all complex nominals with their adjectival modifiers
4. Select all other complex nominals
5. Select all nouns with their adjectival modifiers
6. Select all other nouns
7. Select all verbs
8. Select all adverbs
9. Select the QFW word (skipped in all previous steps)
10. Select all other words
Who coined the term “cyberspace” in his novel “Neuromancer”?

cyberspace/1 Neuromancer/1 term/4 novel/4 coined/7
Question Answering

Answer Types and Query Formulation
Question Answering

Passage Retrieval and Answer Extraction
Factoid Q/A
Passage Retrieval

- Step 1: IR engine retrieves documents using query terms
- Step 2: Segment the documents into shorter units
  - something like paragraphs
- Step 3: Passage ranking
  - Use answer type to help rerank passages
Features for Passage Ranking

Either in rule-based classifiers or with supervised machine learning

- Number of Named Entities of the right type in passage
- Number of query words in passage
- Number of question N-grams also in passage
- Proximity of query keywords to each other in passage
- Longest sequence of question words
- Rank of the document containing passage
Factoid Q/A
Answer Extraction

- Run an answer-type named-entity tagger on the passages
  - Each answer type requires a named-entity tagger that detects it
  - If answer type is CITY, tagger has to tag CITY
    - Can be full NER, simple regular expressions, or hybrid
- Return the string with the right type:
  - Who is the prime minister of India (PERSON) Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, had told left leaders that the deal would not be renegotiated.
  - How tall is Mt. Everest? (LENGTH) The official height of Mount Everest is 29035 feet
Ranking Candidate Answers

• But what if there are multiple candidate answers!

Q: Who was Queen Victoria’s second son?

• Answer Type: Person

• Passage:

The Marie biscuit is named after Marie Alexandrovna, the daughter of Czar Alexander II of Russia and wife of Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert
Ranking Candidate Answers

• But what if there are multiple candidate answers!

Q: Who was Queen Victoria’s second son?

• Answer Type: Person

• Passage:

The Marie biscuit is named after Marie Alexandrovna, the daughter of Czar Alexander II of Russia and wife of Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.
Use machine learning: Features for ranking candidate answers

**Answer type match:** Candidate contains a phrase with the correct answer type.

**Pattern match:** Regular expression pattern matches the candidate.

**Question keywords:** # of question keywords in the candidate.

**Keyword distance:** Distance in words between the candidate and query keywords.

**Novelty factor:** A word in the candidate is not in the query.

**Apposition features:** The candidate is an appositive to question terms.

**Punctuation location:** The candidate is immediately followed by a comma, period, quotation marks, semicolon, or exclamation mark.

**Sequences of question terms:** The length of the longest sequence of question terms that occurs in the candidate answer.
Candidate Answer scoring in IBM Watson

- Each candidate answer gets scores from >50 components
  - (from unstructured text, semi-structured text, triple stores)

- logical form (parse) match between question and candidate
- passage source reliability
- geospatial location
  - California is "southwest of Montana"
- temporal relationships
- taxonomic classification
Common Evaluation Metrics

1. **Accuracy** (does answer match gold-labeled answer?)

2. **Mean Reciprocal Rank**

   - For each query return a ranked list of M candidate answers.
   - Query score is 1/Rank of the first correct answer
     - *If first answer is correct:* 1
     - *else if second answer is correct:* $\frac{1}{2}$
     - *else if third answer is correct:* $\frac{1}{3}$, etc.
     - *Score is 0 if none of the M answers are correct*

   - Take the mean over all N queries

\[
MRR = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \frac{1}{\text{rank}_i}
\]
Question Answering

Passage Retrieval and Answer Extraction
Question Answering

Using Knowledge in QA
Relation Extraction

• **Answers: Databases of Relations**
  • born-in(“Emma Goldman”, “June 27 1869”)
  • author-of(“Cao Xue Qin”, “Dream of the Red Chamber”)
  • Draw from Wikipedia infoboxes, DBpedia, FreeBase, etc.

• **Questions: Extracting Relations in Questions**
  Whose granddaughter starred in E.T.?
  (acted-in ?x “E.T.”)
  (granddaughter-of ?x ?y)
Temporal Reasoning

- Relation databases
  - (and obituaries, biographical dictionaries, etc.)

- IBM Watson
  "In 1594 he took a job as a tax collector in Andalusia"

Candidates:
  - **Thoreau** is a bad answer (born in 1817)
  - **Cervantes** is possible (was alive in 1594)
Geospatial knowledge (containment, directionality, borders)

- **Beijing** is a good answer for "Asian city"
- **California** is "southwest of Montana"
- geonames.org:
Context and Conversation in Virtual Assistants like Siri

• Coreference helps resolve ambiguities
  U: “Book a table at Il Fornaio at 7:00 with my mom”
  U: “Also send her an email reminder”

• Clarification questions:
  U: “Chicago pizza”
  S: “Did you mean pizza restaurants in Chicago or Chicago-style pizza?”
Question Answering

Using Knowledge in QA