Relationship Modeling: Graph Neural Networks (GNNs)

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Computer Science & Engineering

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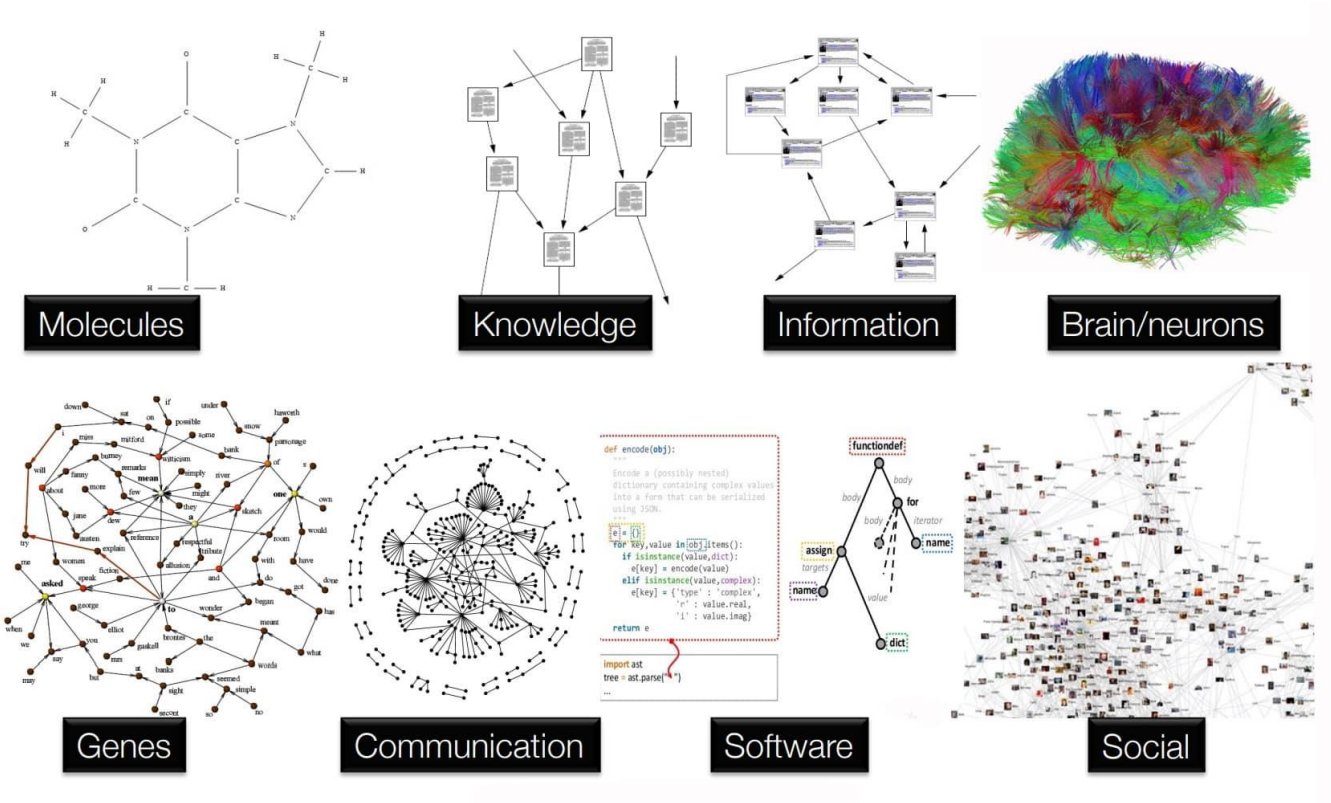
Outline

- Why graphs?
- Graphs: basic notions
- Graph neural networks
- Scaling up training

Why graphs?

Graphs are everywhere!



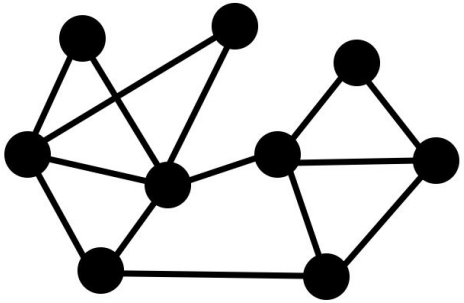


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Graphs model **relationships/ interactions**

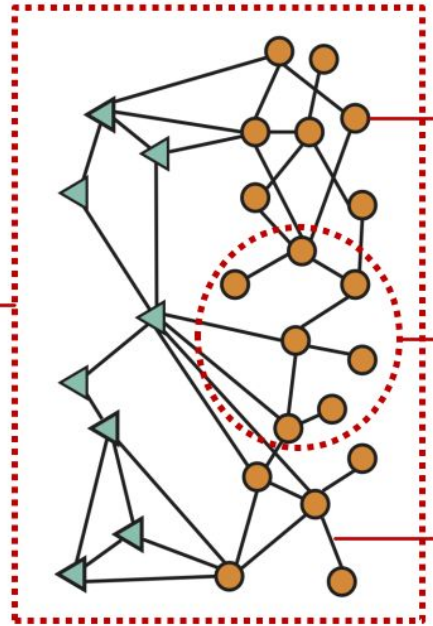
Image credit: https://blogs.nvidia.com/blog/2022/10/24/what-are-graph-neural-networks/

Different tasks on graphs

The whole graph is part of all available data, i.e., a data point

Graph prediction (classification/regression) , graph generation
A graph is a data point

The whole graph is all available data



Node prediction (classification/regression)
given labels over part of the graph

Community detection/clustering
Clustering nodes/edges

Link prediction
Predict links should exists or not

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Example task 1: Protein folding

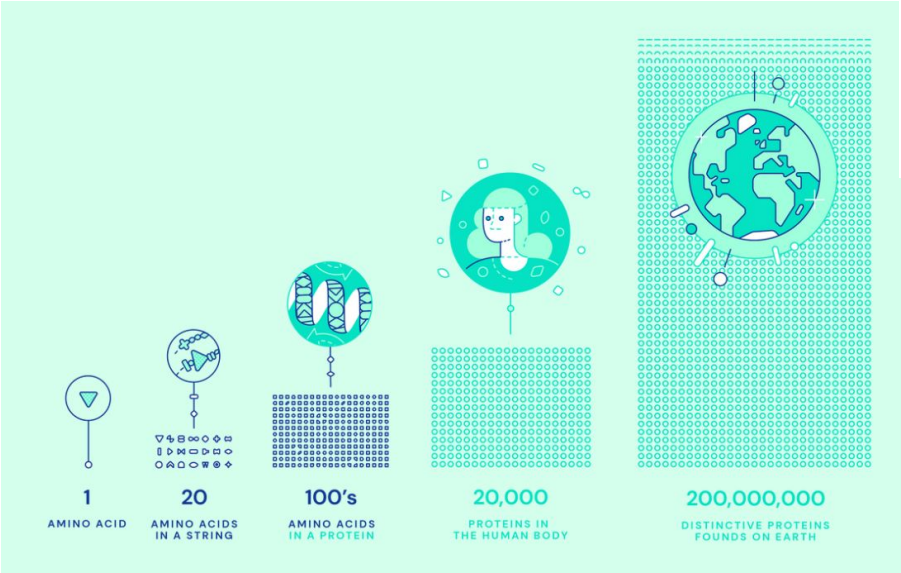
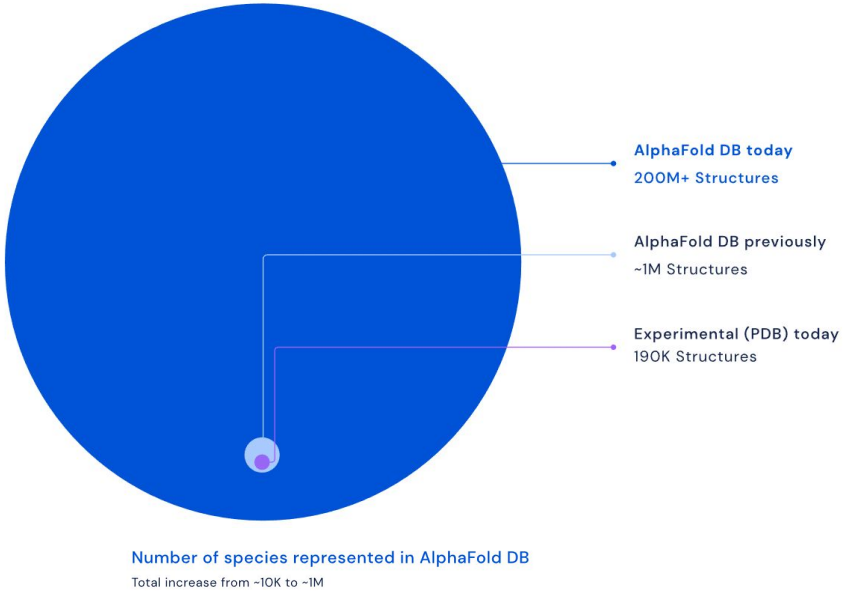
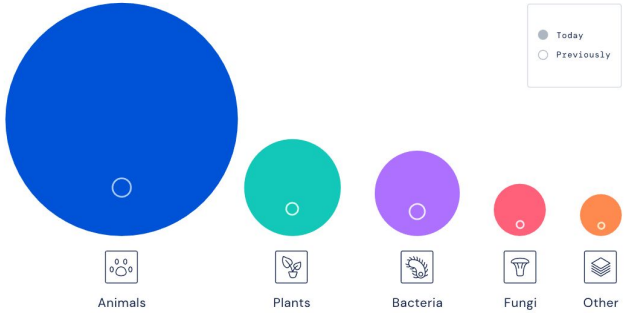


Image credit: Deep Mind



Number of species represented in AlphaFold DB

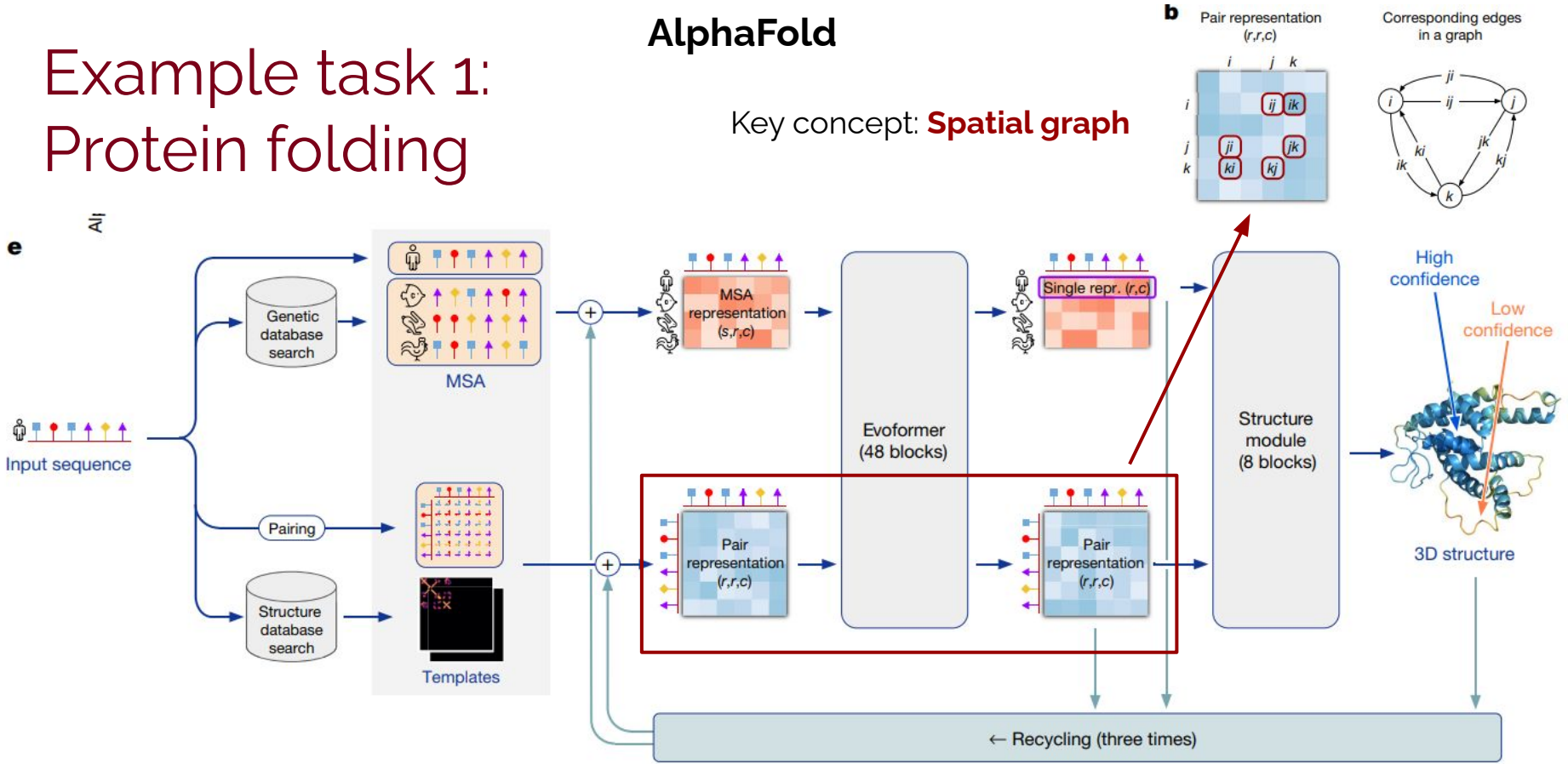
Total increase from ~10K to ~1M



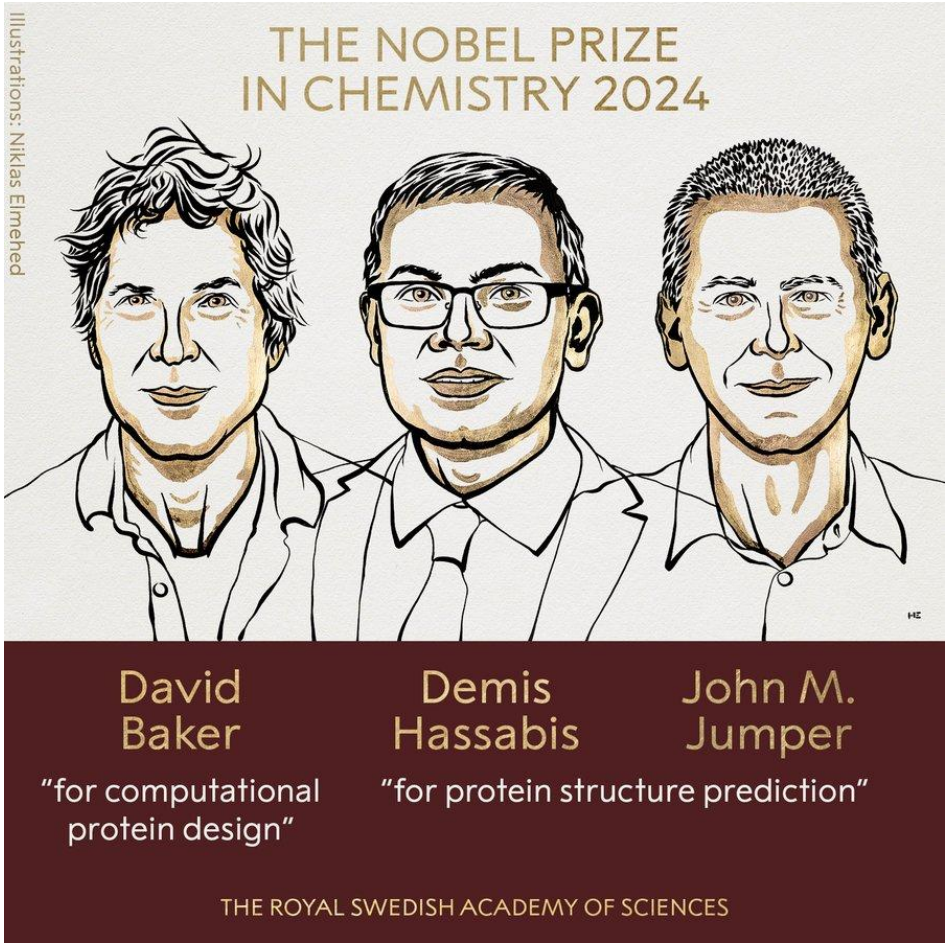
Example task 1: Protein folding

AlphaFold

Key concept: **Spatial graph**



Complete story: https://www.deepmind.com/research/highlighted-research/alphafold
Paper: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-03819-2



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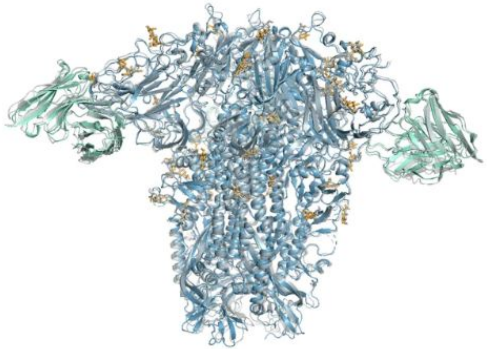
NEWS | 27 March 2025

AlphaFold is running out of data — so drug firms are building their own version

Thousands of 3D protein structures locked up in big-pharma vaults will be used to create a new AI tool that won't be open to academics.

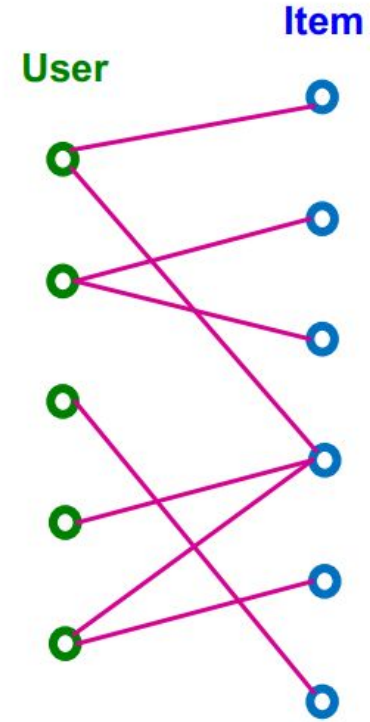
By Ewen Callaway



An AlphaFold 3 model of a common cold spike protein (blue) interacting with antibodies (green). Credit: Google DeepMind

https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-00868-9

Example task 2: Recommendation systems



online shopping, music/movie recommendation

Nodes:
Users, items
Edges:
User-item interactions

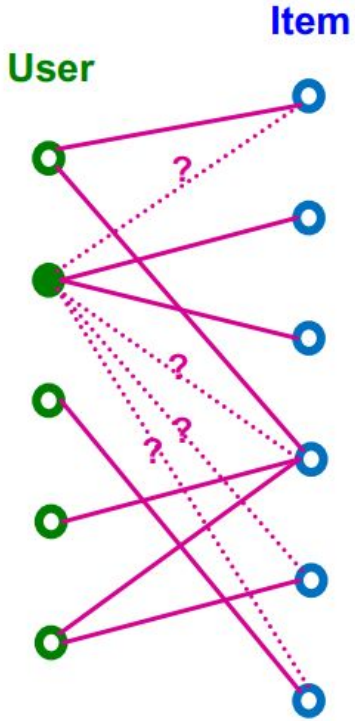
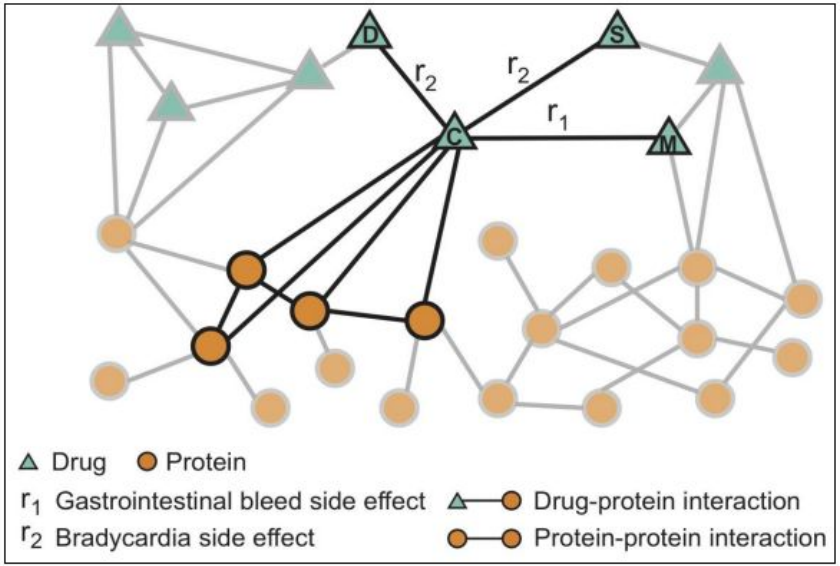


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Example task 3: Drug adverse effect discovery

- **Nodes**: Drugs & Proteins
- **Edges**: Interactions



Query: How likely will Simvastatin and Ciprofloxacin, when taken together, break down muscle tissue?

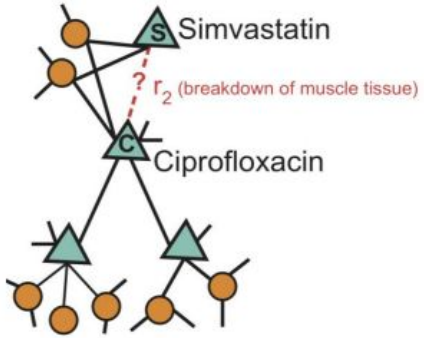
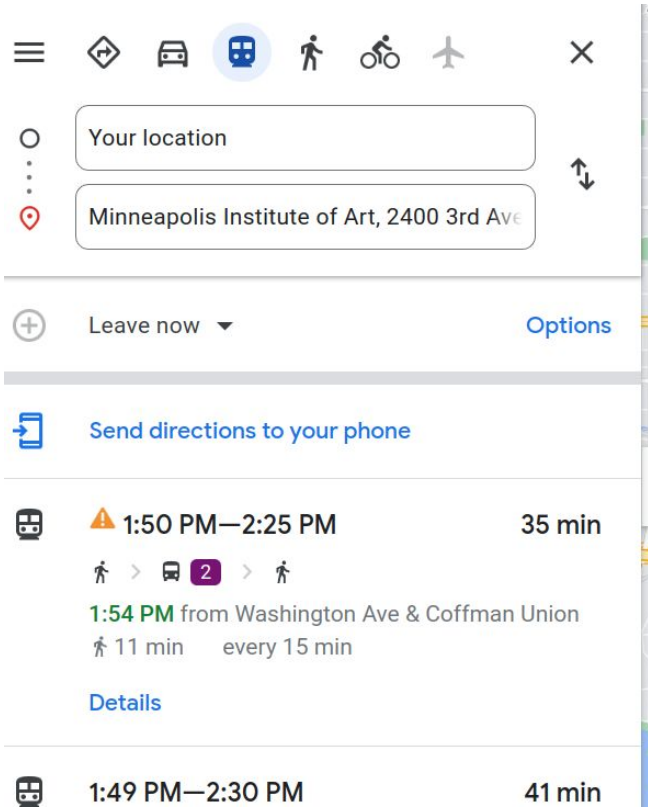
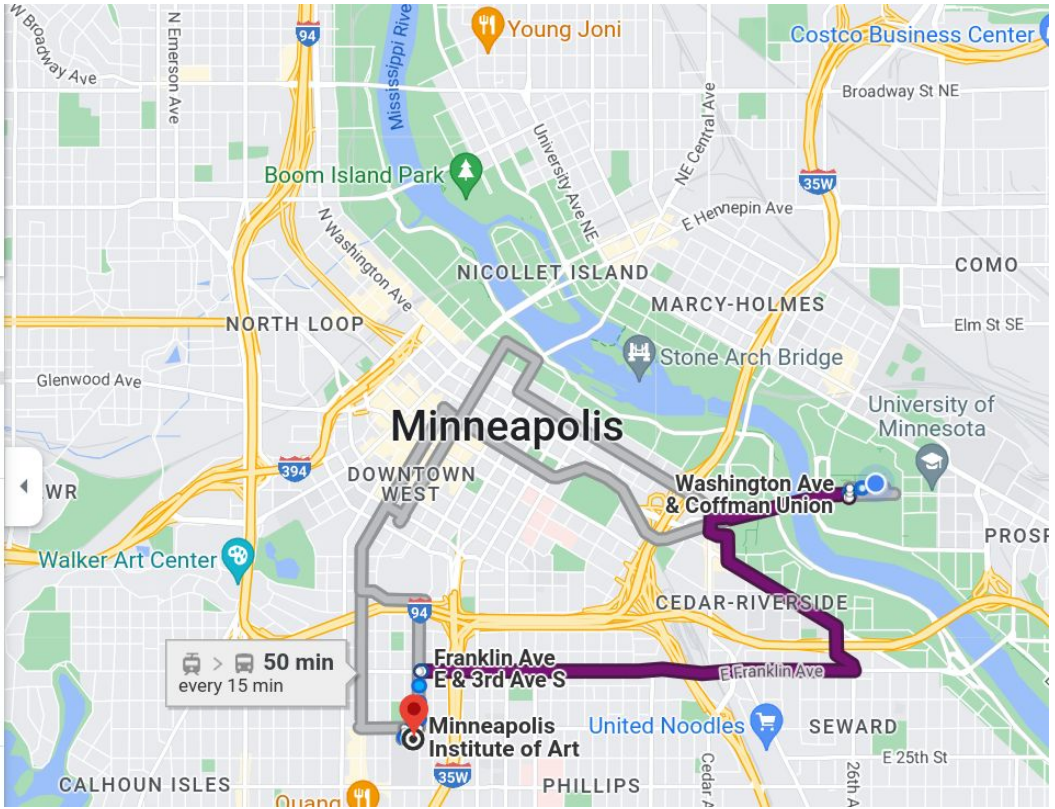


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Example task 4: Traffic prediction





Example task 4: Traffic prediction

- **Nodes:** Road segments
- **Edges:** Connectivity between road segments
- **Prediction:** Time of Arrival (ETA)

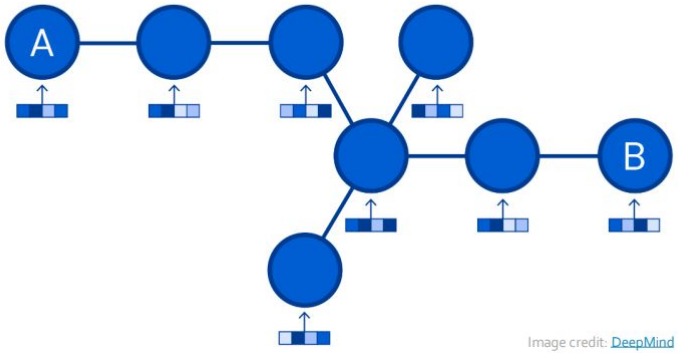


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

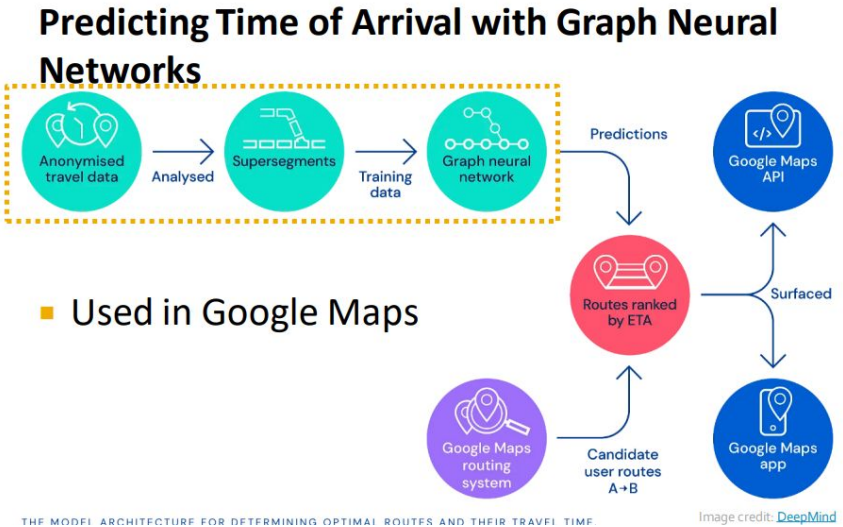
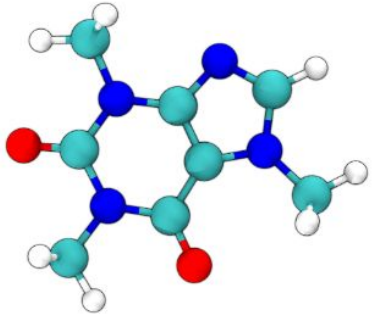


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Subgraph discovery

Example task 5: Drug discovery



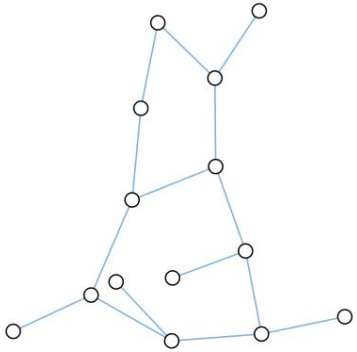
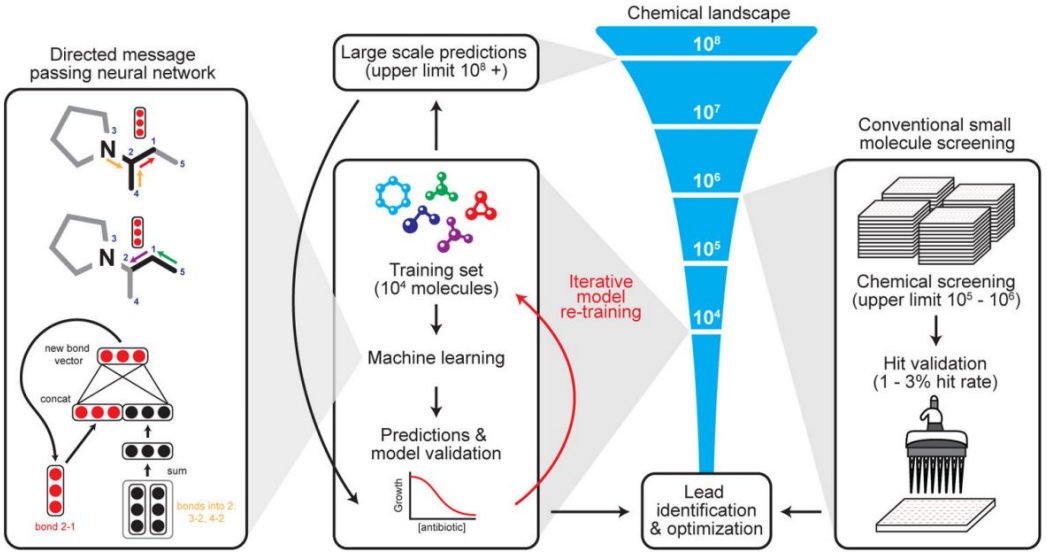


Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/gnn-intro/

Molecules as graphs:
Nodes: atoms **Edges**: chemical bounds

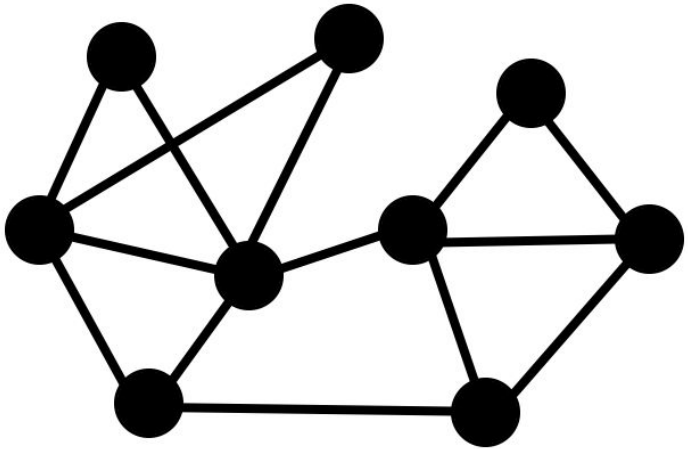


full-graph prediction

Image credit: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32084340/

Graphs: basic notions

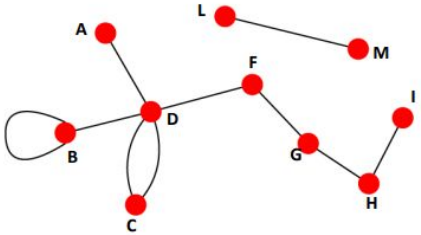
Basic objects



- N : Nodes (also vertices)
- E : Edges (also links)
- $G(N, E)$: Graph

Undirected

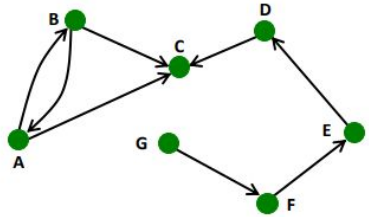
- **Links:** undirected (symmetrical, reciprocal)



- **Examples:**
  - Collaborations
  - Friendship on Facebook

Directed

- **Links:** directed (arcs)



- **Examples:**
  - Phone calls
  - Following on Twitter

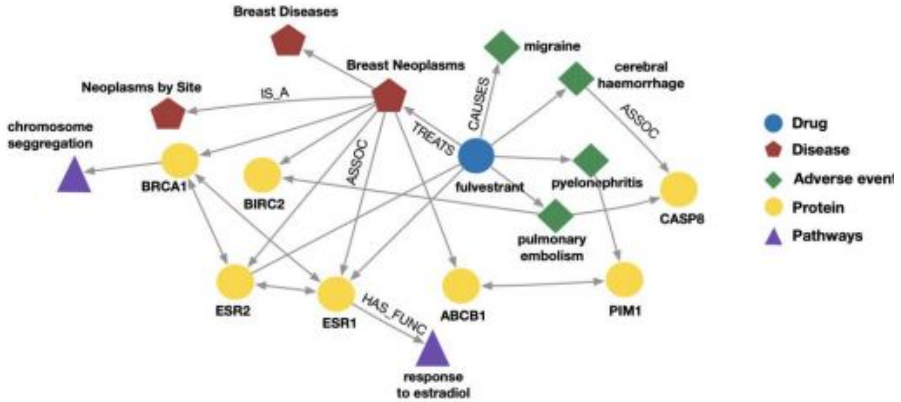
Image credit: Stanford CS224W

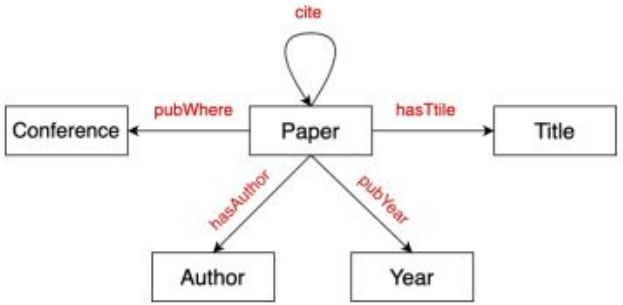
Heterogeneous graphs

Nodes/Edges are multi-typed

$$G(N, E, T, R)$$

T: types of nodes
R: types of relationships





Biomedical Knowledge Graphs

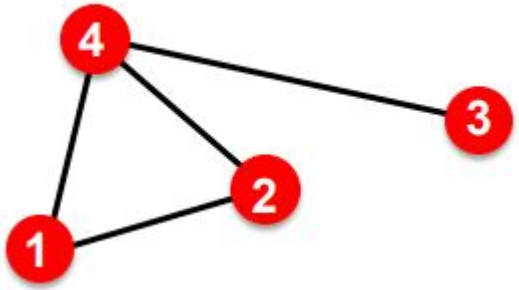
Example node: Migraine
Example edge: (fulvestrant, Treats, Breast Neoplasms)
Example node type: Protein
Example edge type (relation): Causes

Academic Graphs

Example node: ICML
Example edge: (GraphSAGE, NeurIPS)
Example node type: Author
Example edge type (relation): pubYear

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Graph representation



Undirected graphs

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

Adjacency matrix

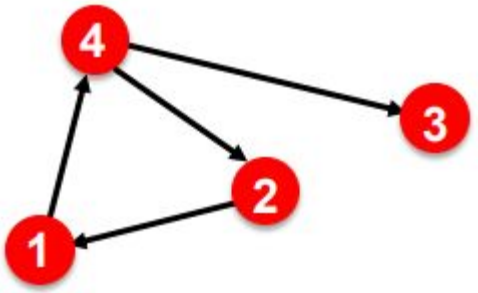
(1, 4), (1, 2)
(2, 1), (2, 4)
(3, 4)
(4, 1), (4, 2), (4, 3)

Edge list

1: 2, 4
2: 1, 4
3: 4
4: 1, 2, 3

Adjacency list

Graph representation



Directed graphs

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

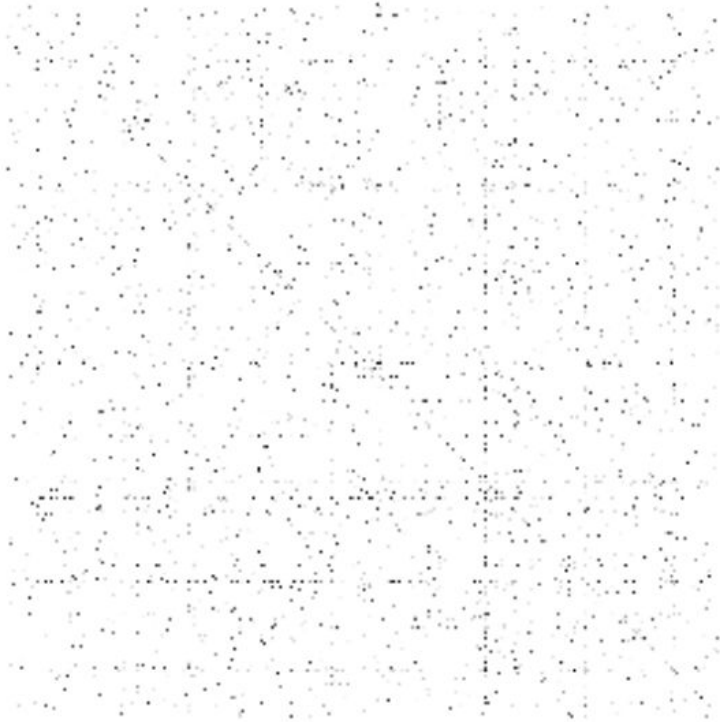
(1, 4)
(2, 1)

(4, 2), (4, 3)

1: 4
2: 1
3:
4: 2, 3

Adjacency matrix **Edge list** **Adjacency list**

Adjacency matrix is often inefficient



NETWORK	NODES	LINKS	DIRECTED/ UNDIRECTED	N	E
Internet	Routers	Internet connections	Undirected	192,244	609,066
WWW	Webpages	Links	Directed	325,729	1,497,134
Power Grid	Power plants, transformers	Cables	Undirected	4,941	6,594
Phone Calls	Subscribers	Calls	Directed	36,595	91,826
Email	Email Addresses	Emails	Directed	57,194	103,731
Science Collaboration	Scientists	Co-authorship	Undirected	23,133	93,439
Actor Network	Actors	Co-acting	Undirected	702,388	29,397,908
Citation Network	Paper	Citations	Directed	449,673	4,689,479
E. Coli Metabolism	Metabolites	Chemical reactions	Directed	1,039	5,802
Protein Interactions	Proteins	Binding interactions	Undirected	2,018	2,930

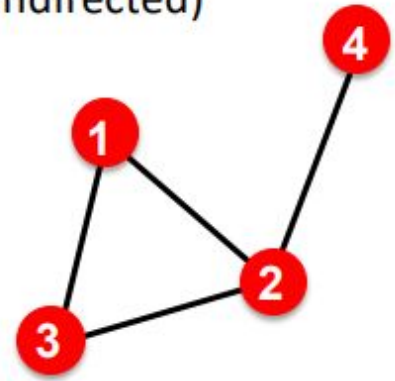
Density = |E|/|N|^2

Real-world graphs are often very sparse

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

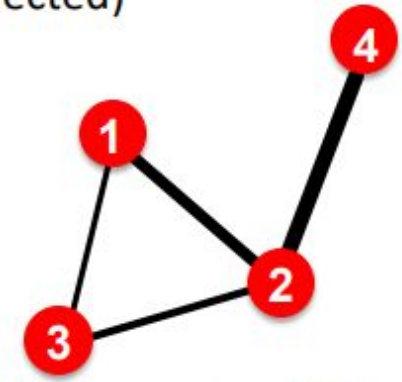
Weighted graphs

- **Unweighted**
  (undirected)



$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

- **Weighted**
  (undirected)



$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 2 & 0.5 & 0 \\ 2 & 0 & 1 & 4 \\ 0.5 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 4 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Graph isomorphism/equivalence

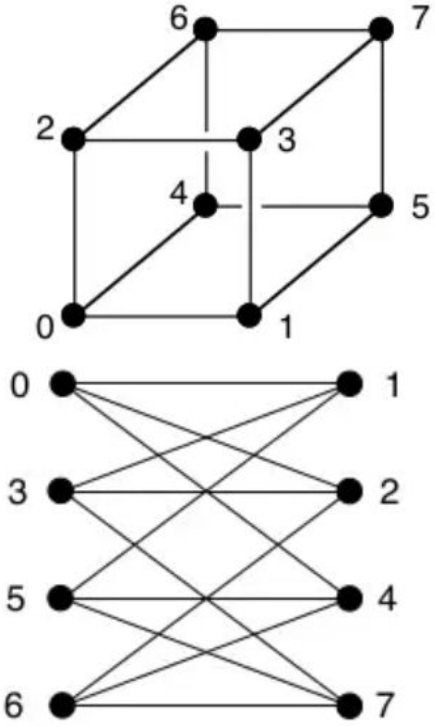


Image credit:
https://tonicanada.medium.com/brute-force-code-for-isomorphisms-1241ef180570

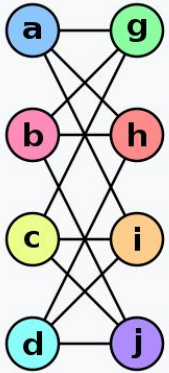
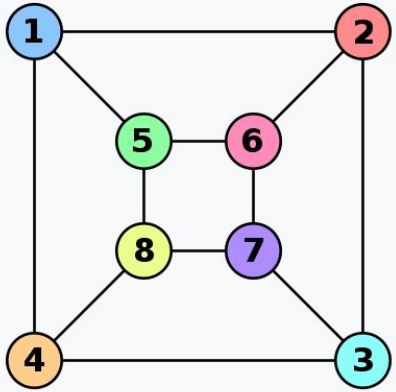
Graph G	Graph H	An isomorphism between G and H
		$f(a) = 1$ $f(b) = 6$ $f(c) = 8$ $f(d) = 3$ $f(g) = 5$ $f(h) = 2$ $f(i) = 4$ $f(j) = 7$

Image credit: Image credit: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graph_isomorphism

Isomorphism: there exists a bijective mapping, i.e., **permutation**, results in the same neighborhood structure

Permutation invariance

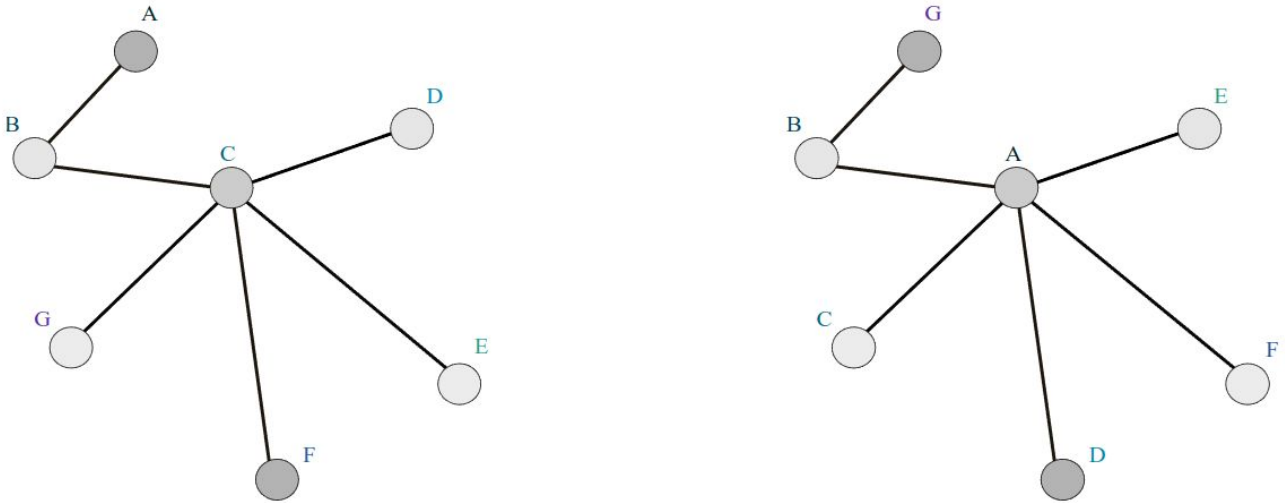


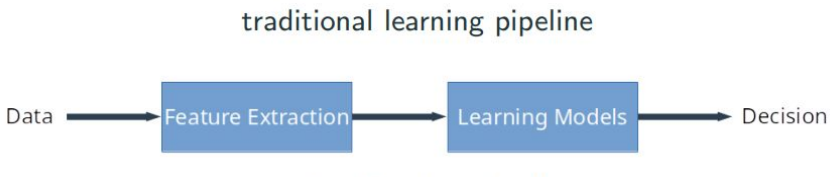
Image credit: Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/understanding-gnns/

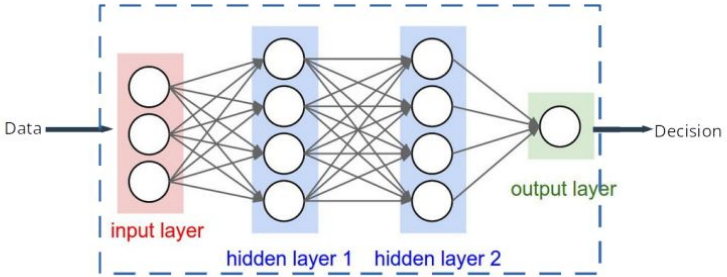
Permutation invariance: permuting the names of the nodes doesn't change the graph, as graph nodes are intrinsically orderless

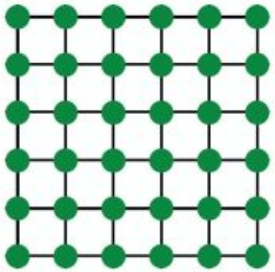
Mathematically: if A is (the adjacency matrix of) a graph, $\Pi A \Pi^{\intercal}$ is (the adjacency matrix of) an equivalent graph for **any permutation matrix** Π

Graph neural networks (GNNs)

Representation learning for graphs

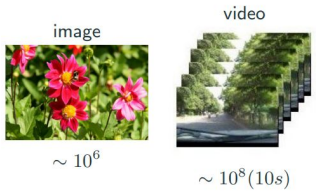


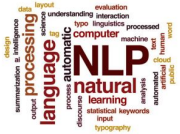




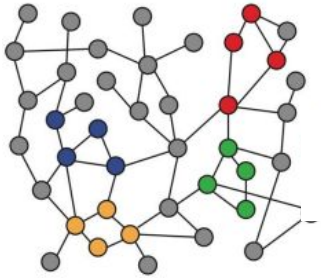
Grid

List

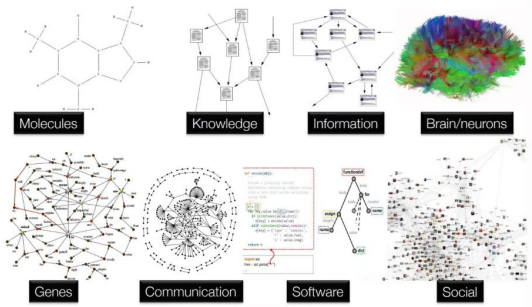




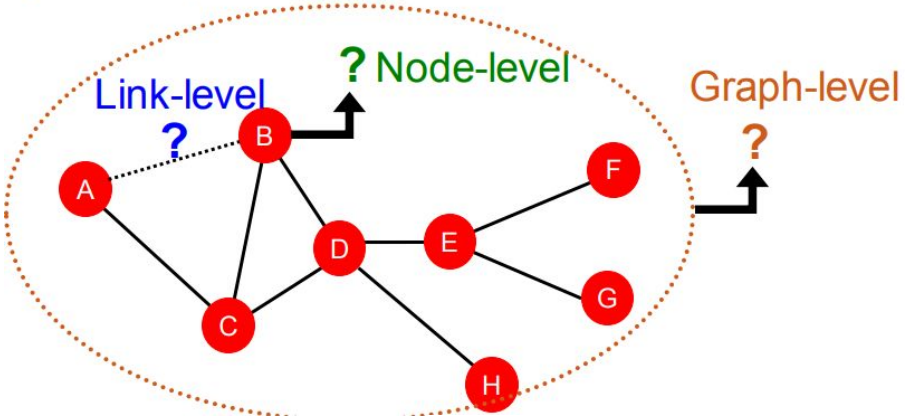
- machine translation, e.g., English ⇆ Chinese
- typing/writing prediction (smart compose)
- semantic classification

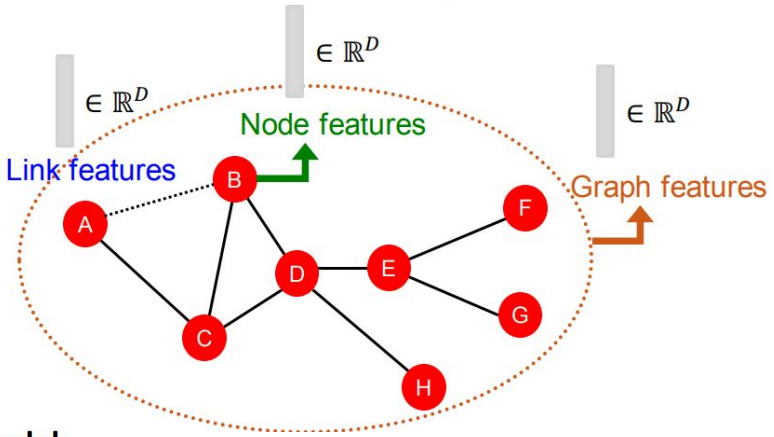


Graph



Where to put the features?





- **Train an ML model:**
  - Random forest
  - SVM
  - Neural network, etc.

$x_1 \rightarrow y_1$

$\vdots$

$x_N \rightarrow y_N$

- **Apply the model:**
  - Given a new node/link/graph, obtain its features and make a prediction

$x \rightarrow y$

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Node embedding

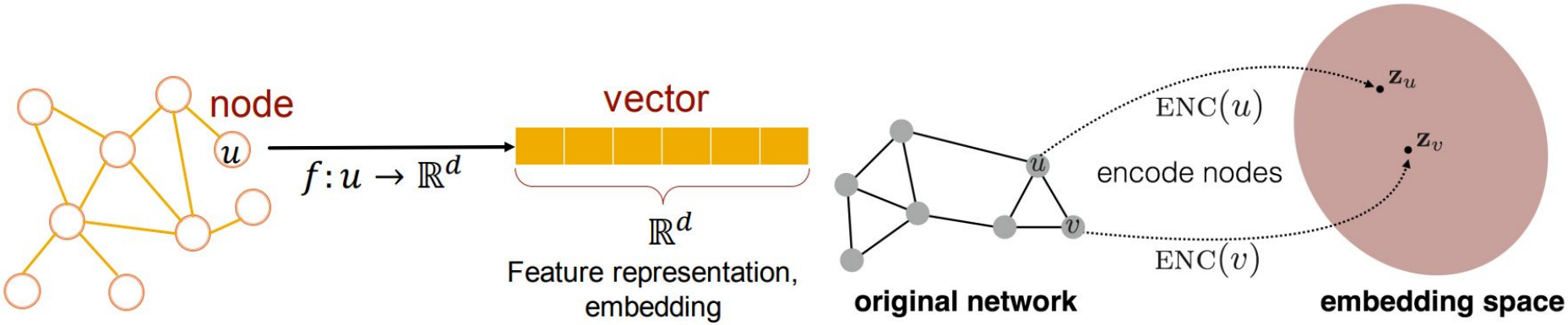


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

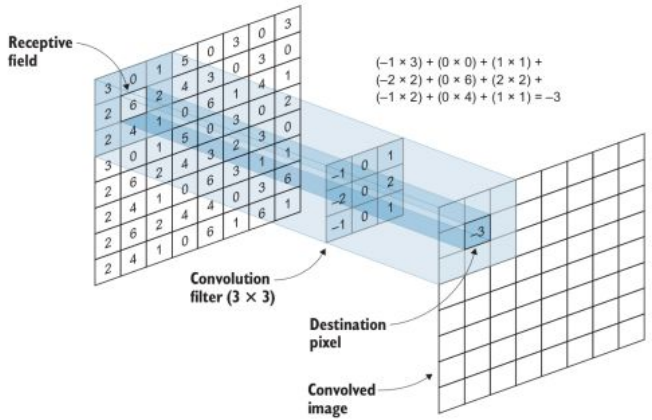
N : set of nodes
A : adjacency matrix
$\boldsymbol{X} \in \mathbb{R}^{|N| \times d}$: node (raw) features
u, v : nodes in N
$\mathcal{N}(u)$: neighbors of u

Node raw features: e.g.,

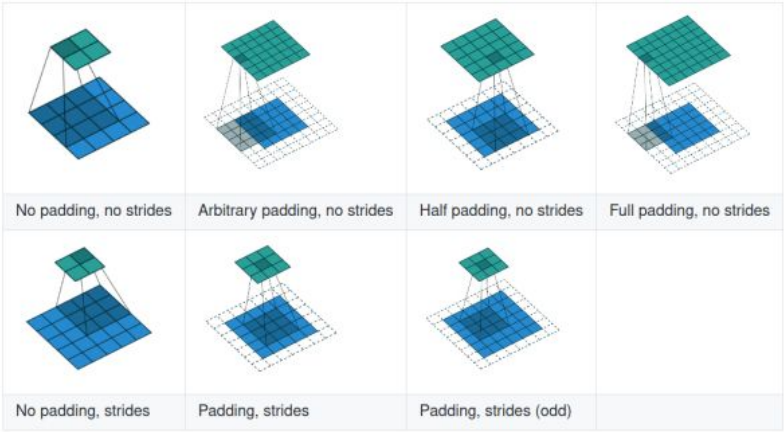
- Biomedical graphs: patient's EHR
- Social network graphs: user profile and images
- When no features: node indicator vector, constant vector

How to define the f ?

We'll bypass fully connected networks directly



(Credit: [Elgendy, 2020])



https://github.com/vdumoulin/conv_arithmetic

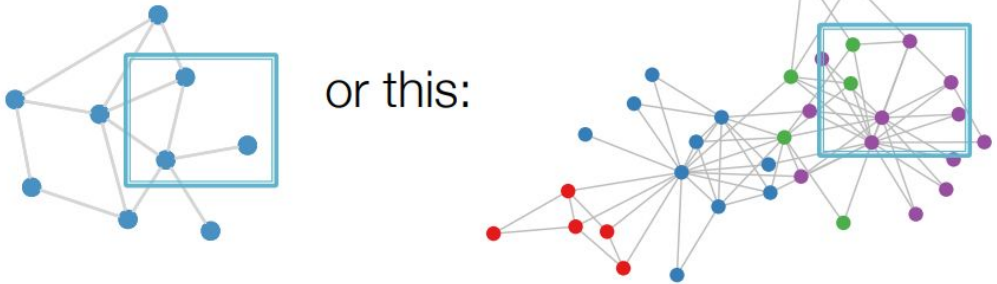
Convolution as performing **local info aggregation** (or **message passing**):

- Each time, the conv window focus on a **local neighborhood** of the current pixel
- Conv effectively **aggregates** the local info by **weighted summation**

How to define the f ?

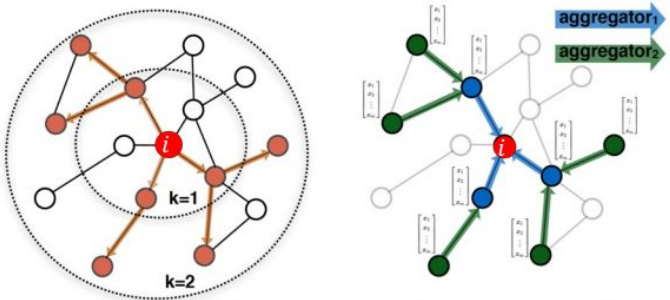
Convolution as performing **local info aggregation** (or **message passing**):

- **Neighborhood**: Each time, the conv window focus on a **local neighborhood** of the current pixel
- **Aggregation**: Conv effectively **aggregates** the local info by **weighted summation**



We need neighbors on the graph!

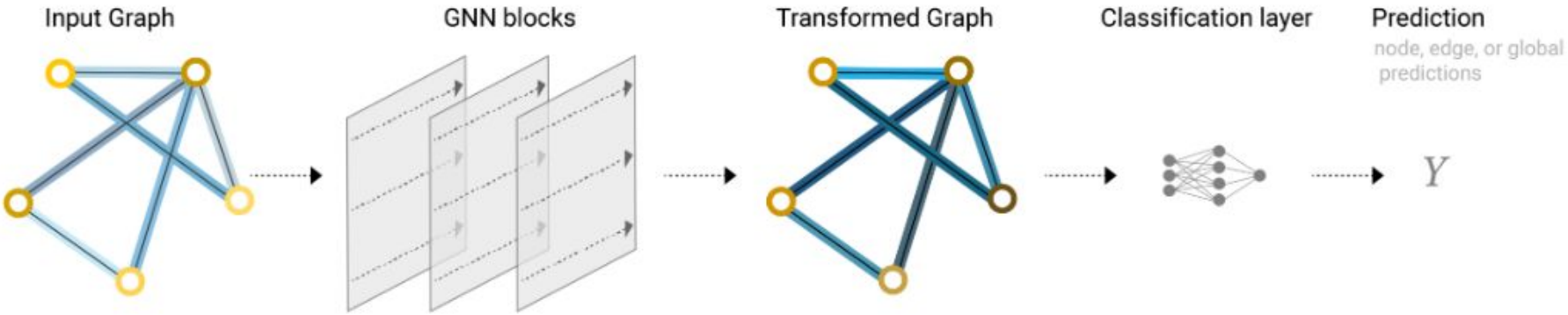
The rigid, grid-based neighborhood doesn't work!



One layer of a graph neural network (GNN)!

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Graph in, graph out

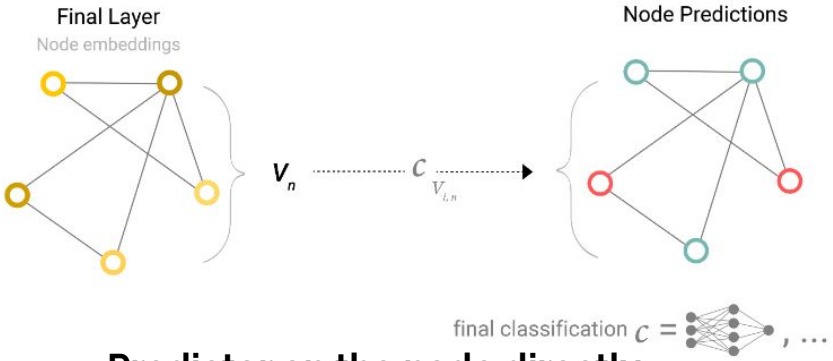


An end-to-end prediction task with a GNN model.

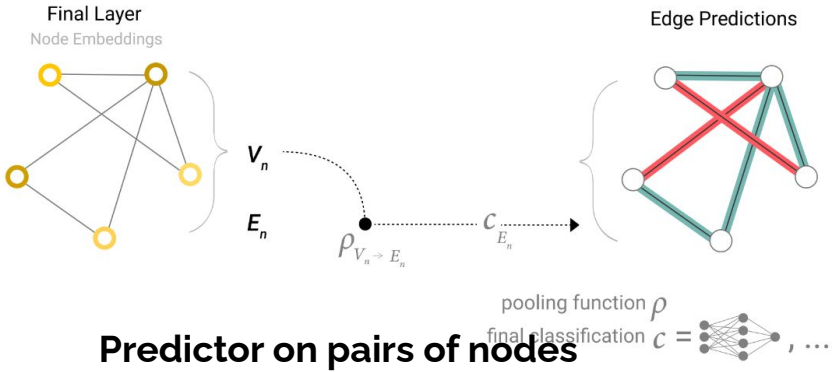
Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/gnn-intro/

How to make supervised predictions?

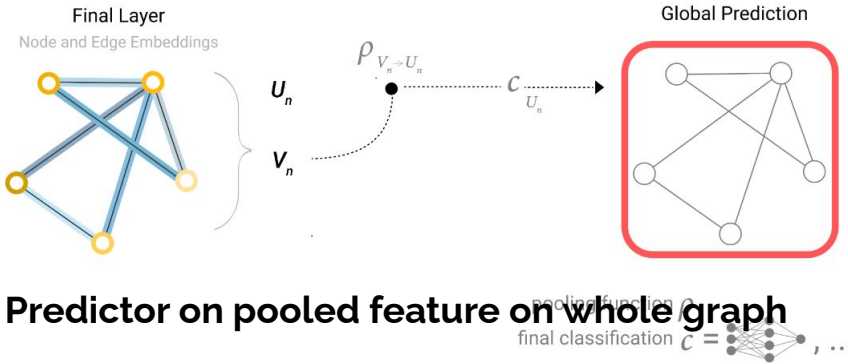
Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/gnn-intro/



Predictor on the node directly



Predictor on pairs of nodes



Predictor on pooled feature on whole graph

How to perform unsupervised learning?

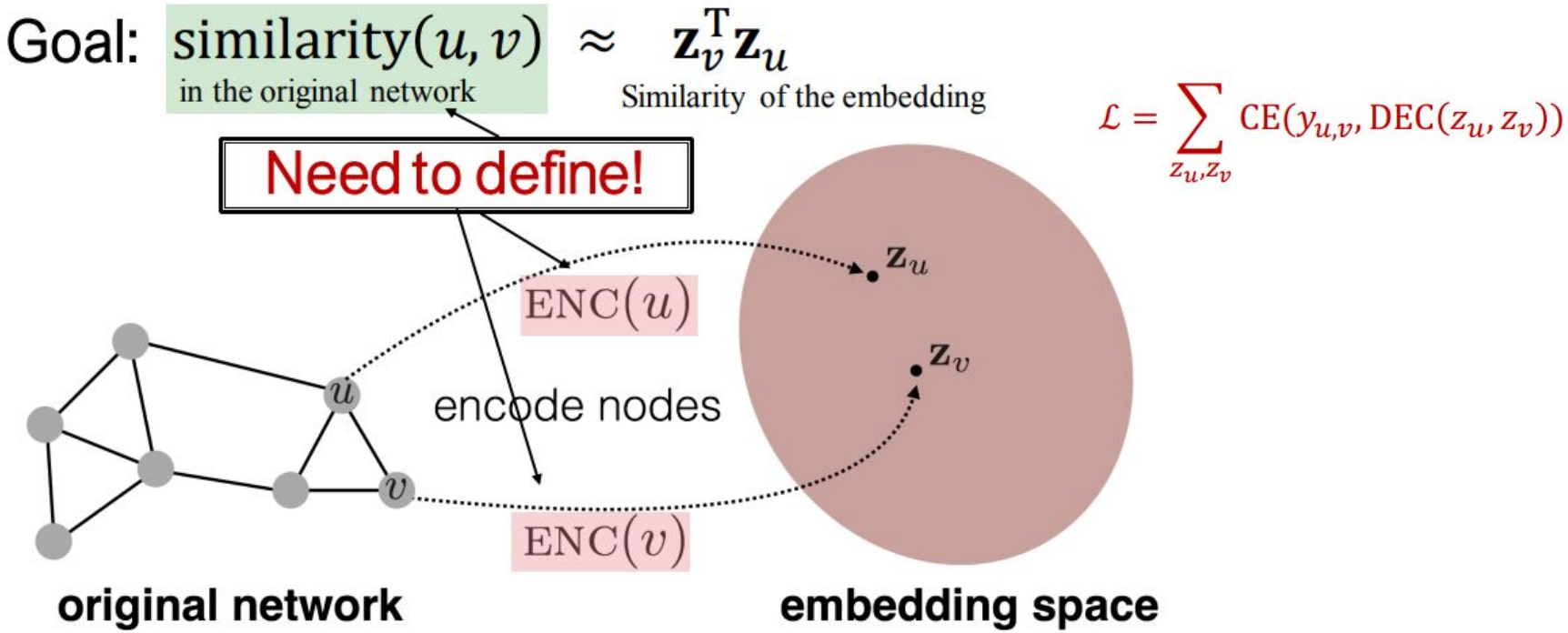
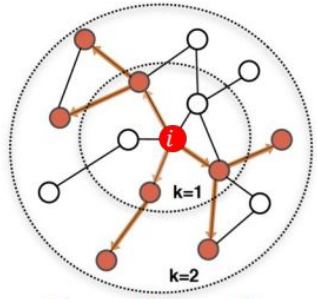
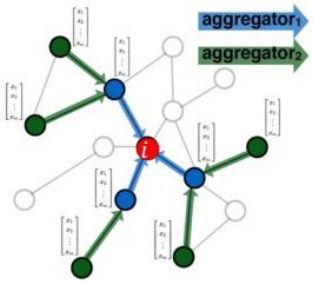
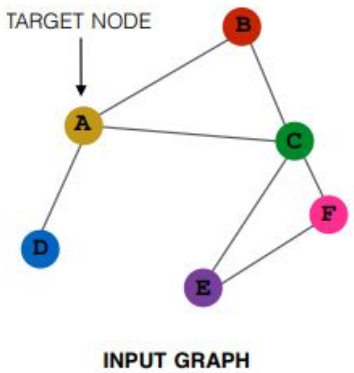


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Look into GNN layers







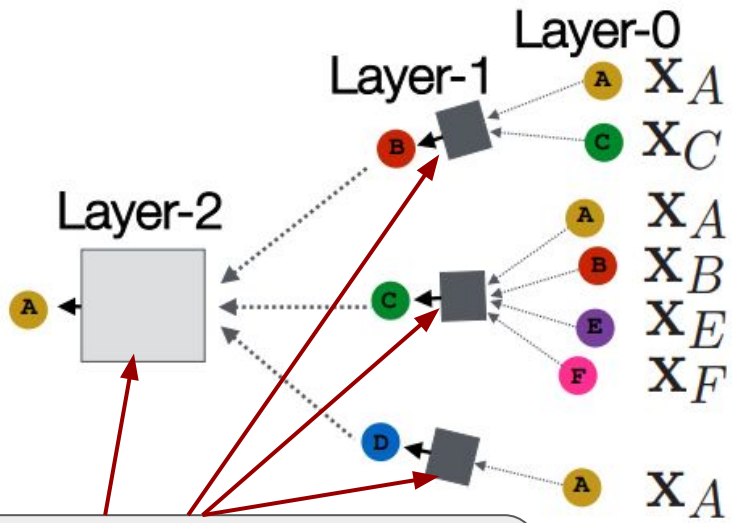


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

These **aggregators** sum up neighboring info, and can be represented by **DNNs**

Permutation invariance

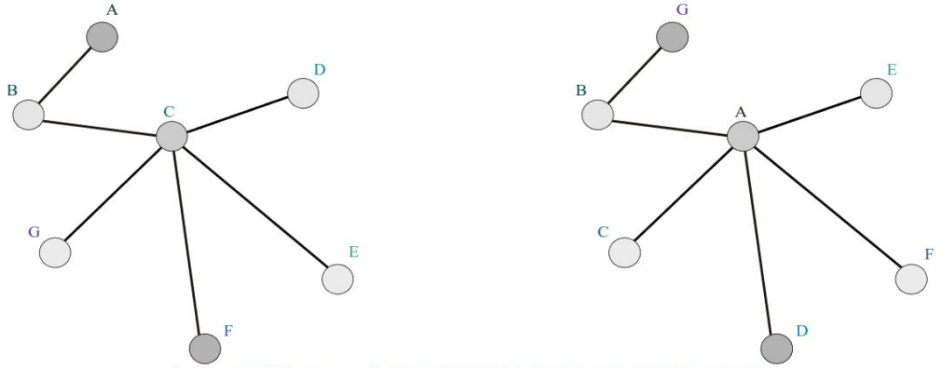


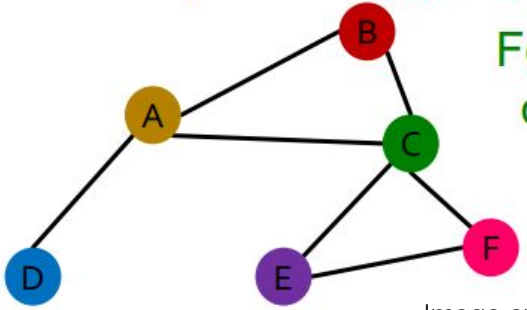
Image credit: Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/understanding-gnns/

Permutation invariance: permuting the names of the nodes doesn't change the graph, as graph nodes are intrinsically orderless

Feature vector for the **whole graph**

For $f : G(\boldsymbol{A}, \boldsymbol{X}) \mapsto \boldsymbol{h}$, $f(\boldsymbol{A}_1, \boldsymbol{X}_2) = f(\boldsymbol{A}_2, \boldsymbol{X}_2)$

Order plan 1: A_1, X_1



For two order plans, output of f should be the same!

Order plan 2: A_2, X_2

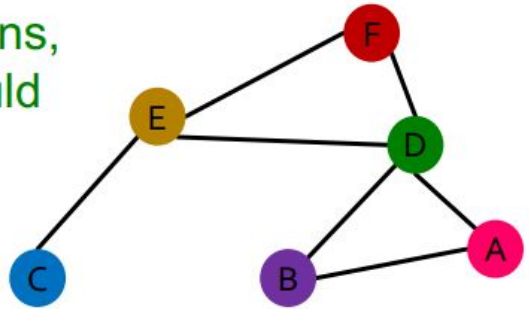


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

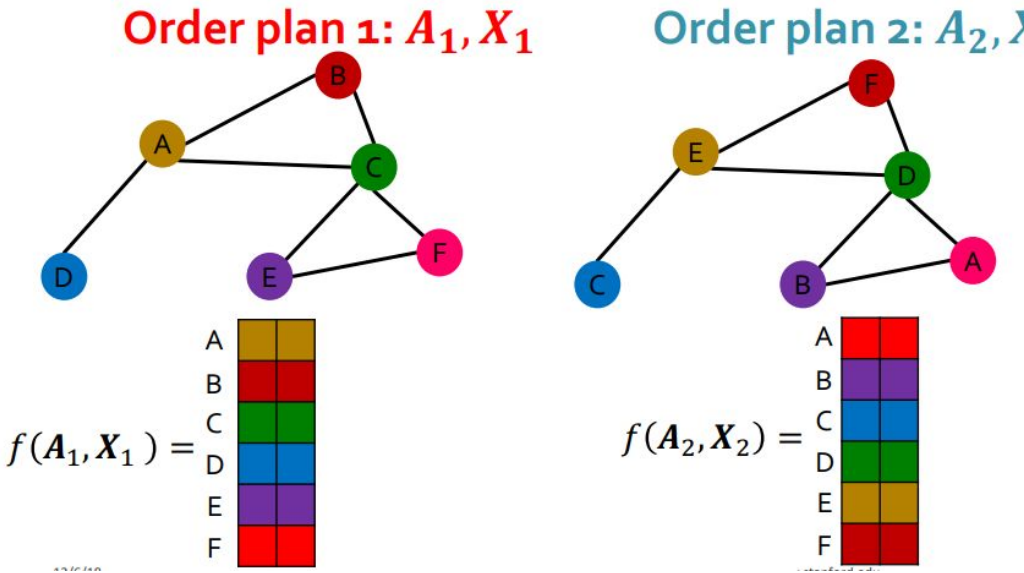
Permutation equivariance

For $f : G(\boldsymbol{A}, \boldsymbol{X}) \mapsto \boldsymbol{H} \in \mathbb{R}^{|N| \times d}$

$$f(\boldsymbol{\Pi A \Pi}^{\intercal}, \boldsymbol{\Pi X}) = \boldsymbol{\Pi} f(\boldsymbol{A}, \boldsymbol{X})$$

for any permutation $\boldsymbol{\Pi}$

Collection of feature vectors on all nodes



In other words, if the nodes are re-ordered, the learned features are re-ordered accordingly, **so features are attached to nodes not their names**

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

A typical GNN consists of multiple permutation equivariant/invariant layers

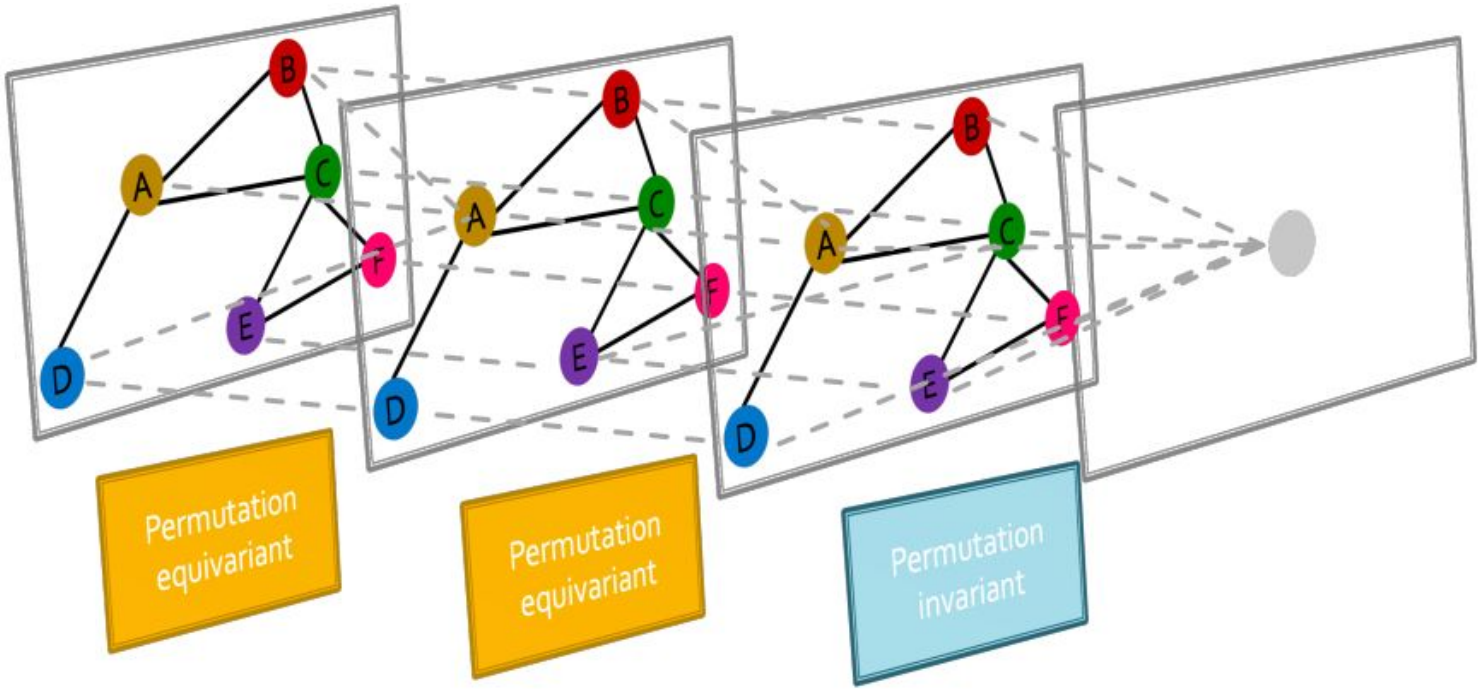
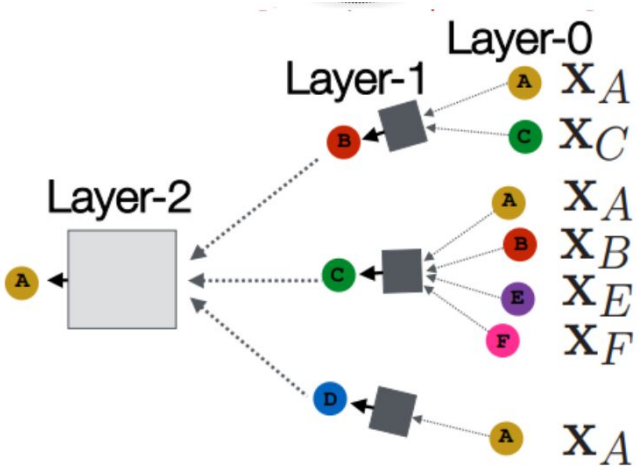


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Graph convolutional networks (GCNs)



$$h_v^{(0)} = x_v \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's initial embedding.

... is just node v's original features.

and for $k = 1, 2, \ldots$ upto K:

$$h_v^{(k)} = f^{(k)}\left(W^{(k)} \cdot \frac{\sum_{u \in \mathcal{N}(v)} h_u^{(k-1)}}{|\mathcal{N}(v)|} + B^{(k)} \cdot h_v^{(k-1)} \right) \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's embedding at step k.

Mean of v's neighbour's embeddings at step $k-1$.

Node v's embedding at step $k-1$.

Color Codes:

- Embedding of node v.
- Embedding of a neighbour of node v.
- (Potentially) Learnable parameters.

Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/understanding-gnns/

Graph attention networks (GATs)

$$h_v^{(0)} = x_v \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's initial embedding.

... is just node v's original features.

and for $k = 1, 2, \ldots$ upto K:

$$h_v^{(k)} = f^{(k)}\left(W^{(k)} \cdot \left[\sum_{u \in \mathcal{N}(v)} \alpha_{vu}^{(k-1)} h_u^{(k-1)} + \alpha_{vv}^{(k-1)} h_v^{(k-1)}\right]\right) \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's embedding at step k.

Weighted mean of v 's neighbour's embeddings at step $k-1$.

Node v's embedding at step $k-1$.

where the attention weights $\alpha^{(k)}$ are generated by an attention mechanism $A^{(k)}$, normalized such that the sum over all neighbours of each node v is 1:

$$\alpha_{vu}^{(k)} = \frac{A^{(k)}(h_v^{(k)}, h_u^{(k)})}{\sum_{w \in \mathcal{N}(v)} A^{(k)}(h_v^{(k)}, h_w^{(k)})} \quad \text{for all } (v, u) \in E.$$

Color Codes:

- Embedding of node v.
- Embedding of a neighbour of node v.
- (Potentially) Learnable parameters.

Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/understanding-gnns/

Graph sample and aggregate (GraphSAGE)

$$h_v^{(0)} = x_v \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's initial embedding.

... is just node v's original features.

and for $k = 1, 2, \ldots$ upto K:

$$h_v^{(k)} = f^{(k)}\left(W^{(k)} \cdot \left[\underset{u \in \mathcal{N}(v)}{\mathrm{AGG}}(\{h_u^{(k-1)}\}),\ h_v^{(k-1)}\right]\right) \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's embedding at step k.

Aggregation of v's neighbour's embeddings at step $k-1$ ...

... concatenated with ...

... Node v's embedding at step $k-1$.

Color Codes:

- Embedding of node v.
- Embedding of a neighbour of node v.
- (Potentially) Learnable parameters.

Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/understanding-gnns/

Graph isomorphism networks (GINs)

$$h_v^{(0)} = x_v \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's initial embedding.

... is just node v's original features.

and for $k = 1, 2, \ldots$ upto K:

$$h_v^{(k)} = f^{(k)}\left(\sum_{u \in \mathcal{N}(v)} h_u^{(k-1)} + (1 + \epsilon^{(k)}) \cdot h_v^{(k-1)}\right) \quad \text{for all } v \in V.$$

Node v's embedding at step k.

Sum of v's neighbour's embeddings at step $k-1$.

Node v's embedding at step $k-1$.

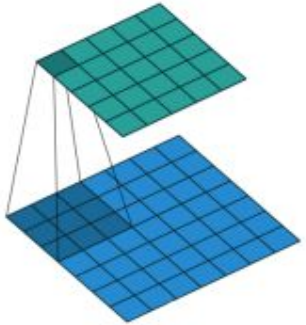
Color Codes:

- Embedding of node v.
- Embedding of a neighbour of node v.
- (Potentially) Learnable parameters.

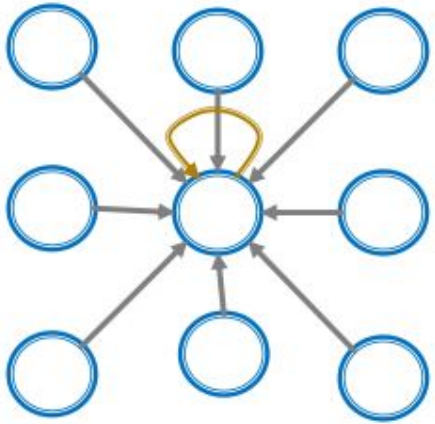
Image credit: https://distill.pub/2021/understanding-gnns/

Connection to CNNs and Transformers

filter:



Image



Graph

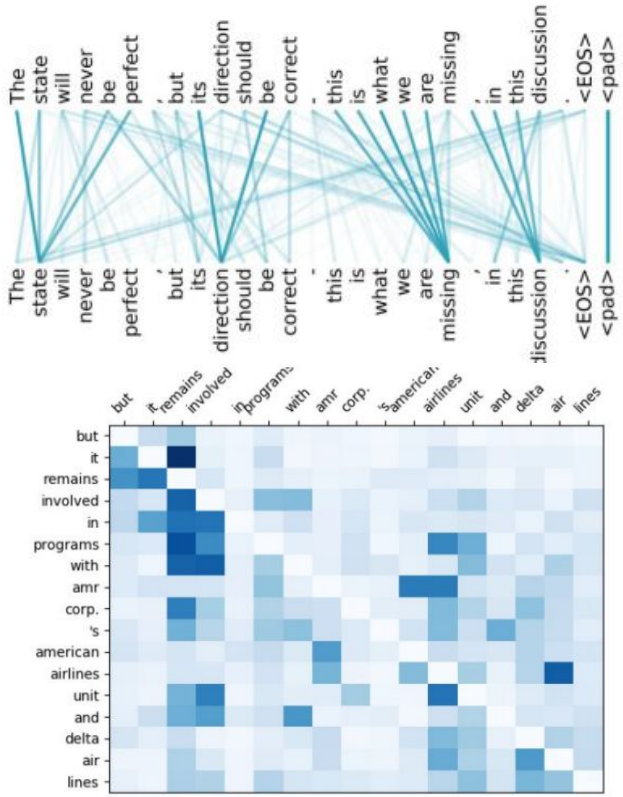
- CNN is GNN that keeps local ordering
- CNN not permutation-invariant

GNN formulation: $\mathrm{h}_v^{(l+1)} = \sigma(\mathbf{W}_l \sum_{u \in \mathrm{N}(v)} \frac{\mathrm{h}_u^{(l)}}{|\mathrm{N}(v)|} + \mathrm{B}_l \mathrm{h}_v^{(l)}), \forall l \in \{0, \ldots, L-1\}$

CNN formulation: $\mathrm{h}_v^{(l+1)} = \sigma(\sum_{u \in \mathrm{N}(v)} \mathbf{W}_l^u \mathrm{h}_u^{(l)} + \mathrm{B}_l \mathrm{h}_v^{(l)}), \forall l \in \{0, \ldots, L-1\}$

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Connection to CNNs and Transformers



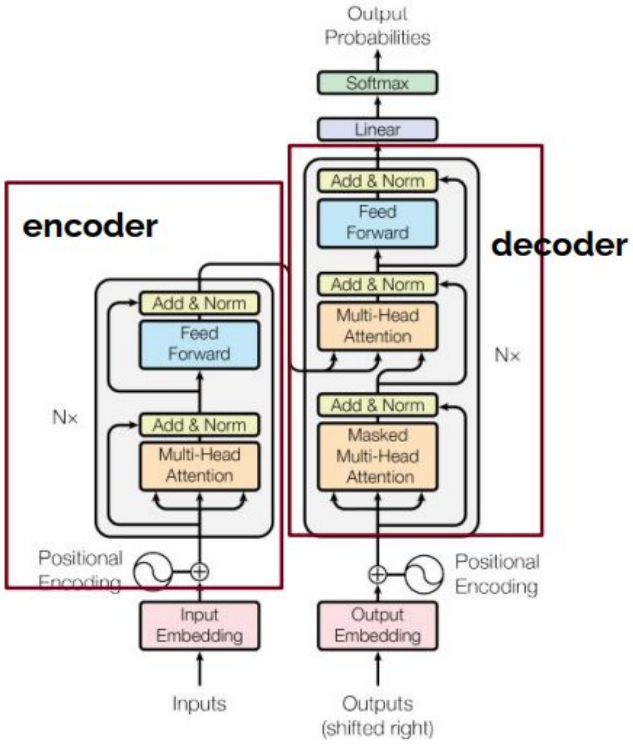


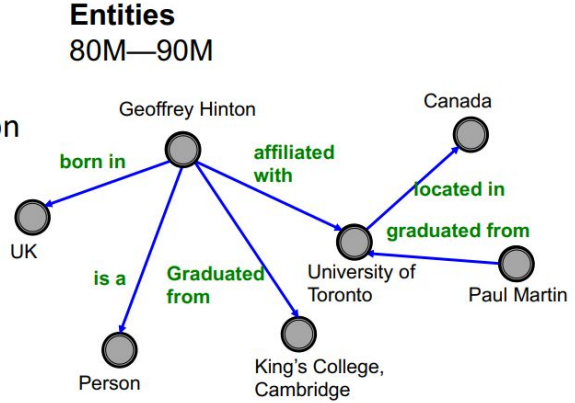
Figure 1: The Transformer - model architecture.

Self-attention (plus feed forward) is a layer of GAT on a complete graph!

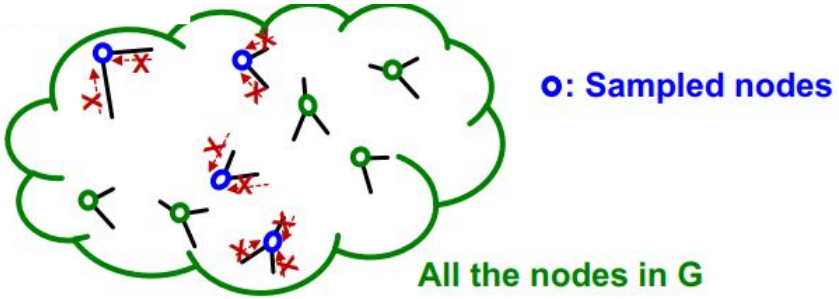
Scaling up training

Practical graphs are large yet sparse

- **Knowledge Graphs (KGs):**
  - Wikidata
  - Freebase
- **ML tasks:**
  - KG completion
  - Reasoning



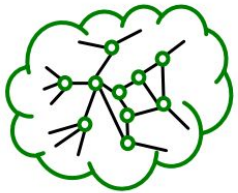
How to perform mini-batch training?



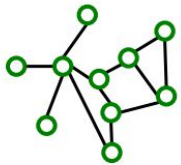
- Mini-batch subsampling induces isolated nodes
- No info to aggregate inside the mini-batch for most nodes

Solution: structured subsampling

Large graph



Sampled subgraph (small enough to be put on a GPU)



Layer-wise node embeddings update on the GPU

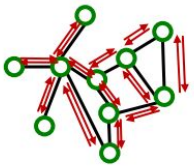
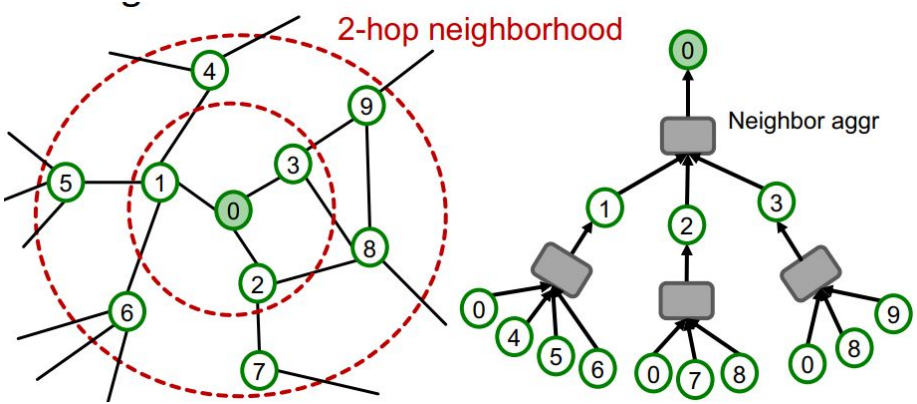
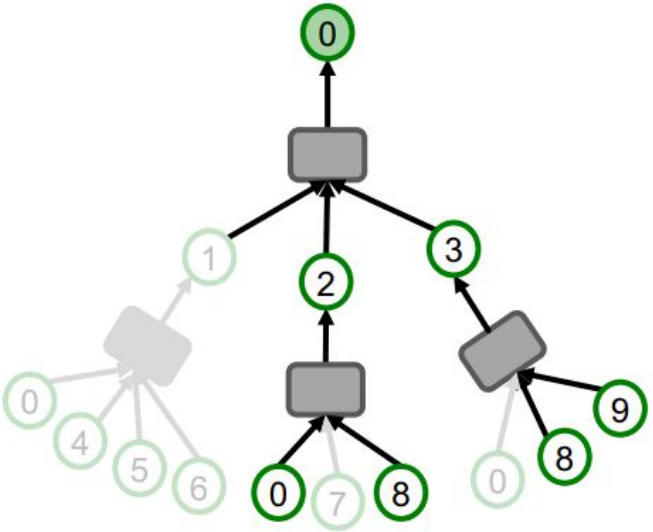
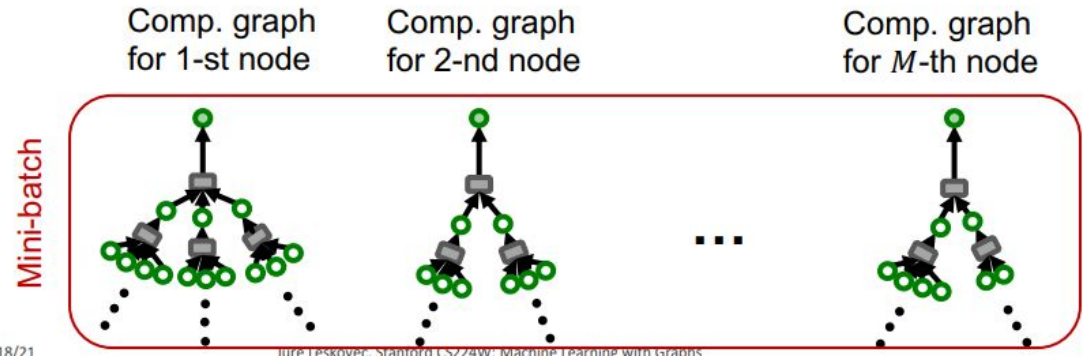


Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Two structured sub-sampling strategies—I







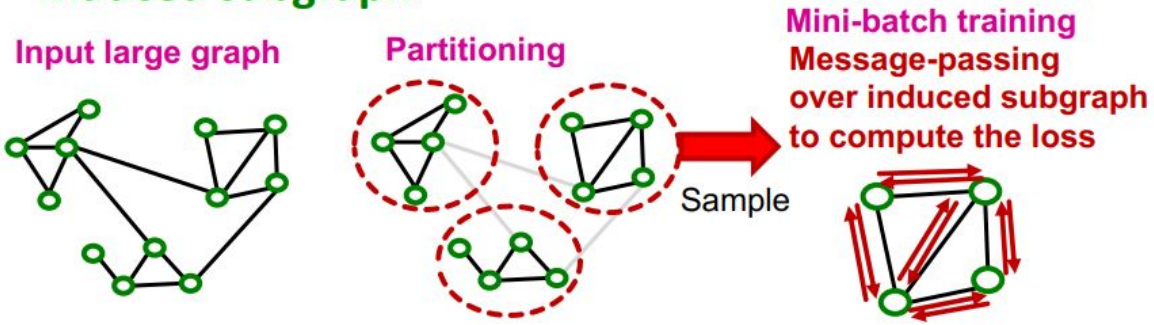
i.e., **neighborhood sampling**, instead of iid uniform sampling

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Two structured sub-sampling strategies—II

Cluster-GCN consists of two steps:

- **Pre-processing**: Given a large graph, partition it into groups of nodes (i.e., subgraphs).
- **Mini-batch training**: Sample one node group at a time. Apply GNN's message passing over the **induced subgraph**.

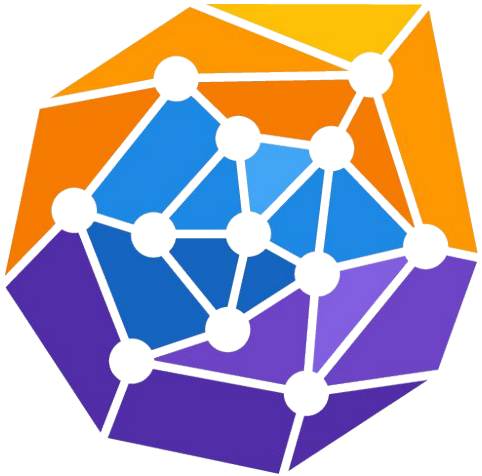


Rationale: important to keep the community structures, i.e., keep the "backbone" nodes

Image credit: Stanford CS224W

Software

PyTorch Geometric (PyG)



https://pytorch-geometric.readthedocs.io/en/latest/

Deep Graph Library (DGL)

https://www.dgl.ai/

Further reading

- What are graph neural networks? https://blogs.nvidia.com/blog/2022/10/24/what-are-graph-neural-networks/
- A Gentle Introduction to Graph Neural Networks https://distill.pub/2021/gnn-intro/
- Understanding Convolutions on Graphs https://distill.pub/2021/understanding-gnns/
- Graph Neural Networks: A Review of Methods and Applications https://arxiv.org/abs/1812.08434
- Stanford CS224W: Machine Learning with Graphs https://web.stanford.edu/class/cs224w/index.html
- Graph Representation Learning https://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~wlh/grl_book/