

Queues in Java

Algorithms and data structures ID1021

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Introduction

We're now ready to take a look at a very common data structure that I'm sure you're familiar with from your everyday life. We're going to implement a queue i.e. a row of items waiting in line. The line is of course ordered so if you add an item to the queue you will have to wait for all other items in the queue to be removed before your new item is in the front of the queue. Queues are also called FIFO, *first-in-first-out*, that describes the functionality. This can be compared to a stack that is also referred to as *last-in-first-out*.

We will implement a linked list. The linked list implementation is as you will see quite easy to implement and work with. It is quite efficient although it does allocate and deallocate data structures in each operation.

Using a linked list

A queue has only one property, the **head**, pointing to the first element in a list of items. New elements are simply *enqueued* to the end of this list and items are *dequeued* from the beginning. Your first queue could look like this:

```
public class Queue {  
    Node head;  
  
    private class Node {  
  
        Integer item;  
        Node next;  
  
        private Node(Integer item, Node list) {
```

```

        this.item = item;
        this.next = list;
    }
}

public Queue() {
    :
}

public void enqueue(Integer item) {
    :
}

public Integer dequeue() {
    :
}

```

We can return a null value if we try to dequeue an item from an empty queue. This is ok for now but of course has the drawback that one would have to check for a returned null value.

What is the drawback of this implementation? What is the cost of removing the next element? What is the cost of adding a new element? Can we do better?

An improvement

Change the structure of the queue so it holds a pointer to the first element, the `head`, of the queue but also a pointer to the last element, the `tail`. When adding a new item you can then access the last node directly and attach the new node immediately instead of traversing the list to find the last node. You have to be careful when removing the last element and when adding the first element but you should be able to do the implementation in a few lines of code.

What is now the cost of adding an element to the queue? Run some benchmarks and show that you have improved the implementation.