

15-442/15-642

Machine Learning Systems

Spring 2026

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Carnegie Mellon University

Outline

Why study machine learning systems

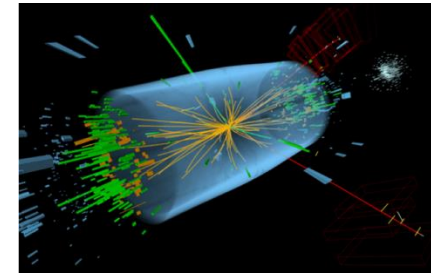
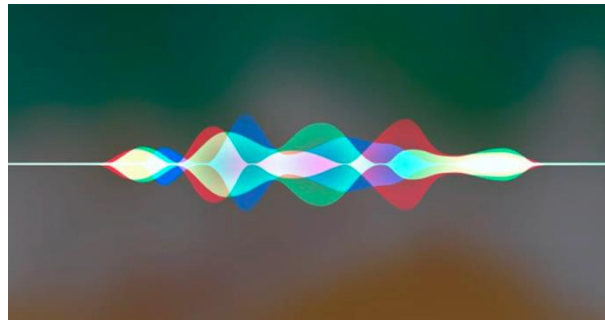
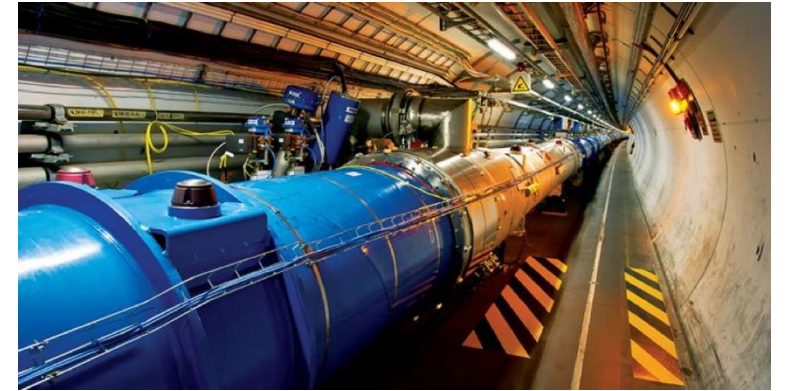
Course info and logistics

Outline

Why study machine learning systems

Course info and logistics

Successes of Machine Learning Today



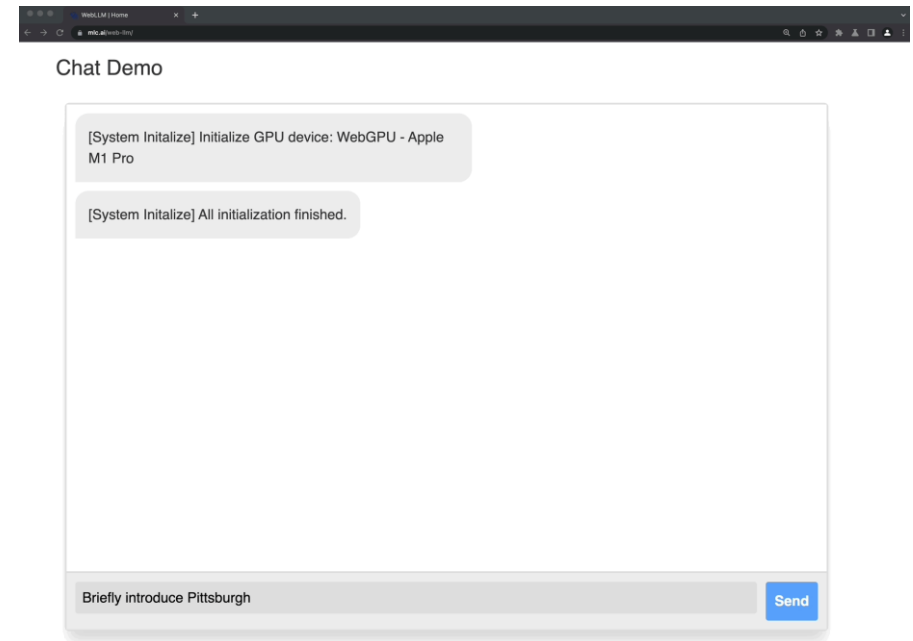
Big Bang of Generative AI

ImageGen models

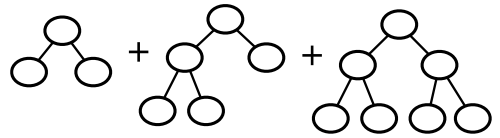
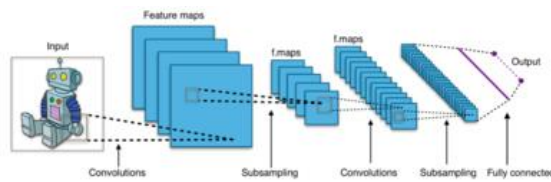
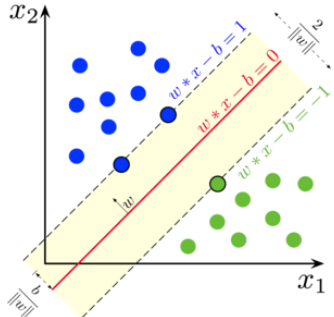


A photo of an astronaut riding a horse on mars

Large language model



1958 – 2000: Research



Perceptron
Algorithm

Backprop

Support Vector
Machine (SVM)

ConvNet

Gradient Boosting
Machine (GBM)

1958

1986

1992

1998

1999

Many algorithms we use today
are **created before 2000**

Based on personal view.
Source: Wikipedia

2000 – 2010: Arrival of Big Data



2001



2004

MTurk

2005



2009



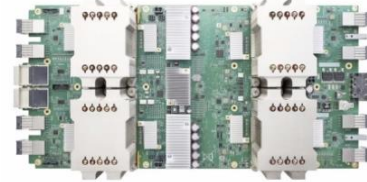
2010



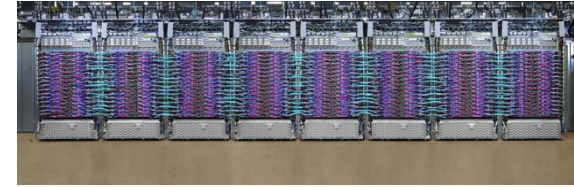
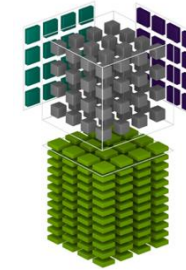
Data serves as fuel for machine learning models

2006 – Now: Compute and Scaling

Public
cloud



TensorCore



2006

2007

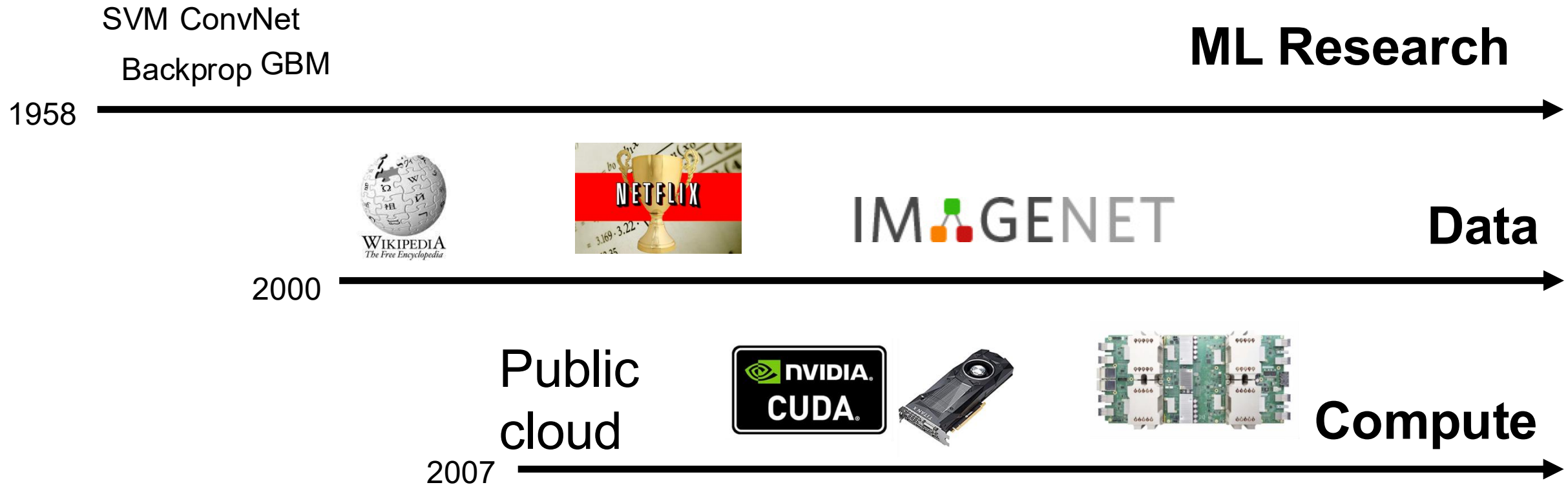
2016

2017

2019

Compute scaling

Three Pillars of ML Applications



Case Study: Ingredient of AlexNet

Year 2012

Methods

SGD
Dropout
ConvNet
Initialization

Data

IMGENET

1M labeled
images

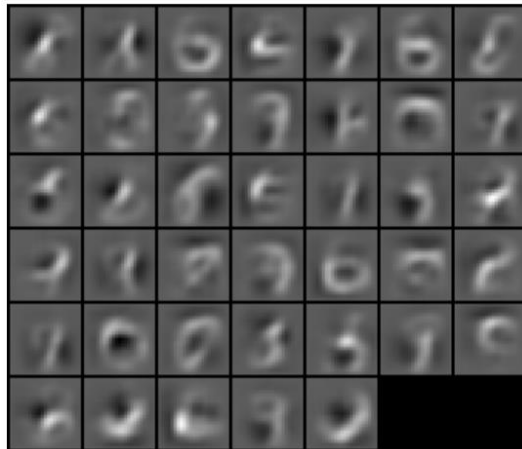
Compute

Two GTX 580

Six days

Instructor's Story: First Deep Learning project

Year



Language	files	blank	comment	code
C	3	84	721	22755
C/C++ Header	43	1773	2616	12324
CUDA	21	1264	1042	7871
C++	17	268	343	1472
MATLAB	9	49	9	245
make	3	26	10	84
Python	2	12	0	42
SUM:	98	3476	4741	44793

One model variant

44k lines of code, including CUDA kernels for GTX 470

Six months of engineering effort

The project did not work out in the end.

Machine Learning Systems



ResNet
Transformer

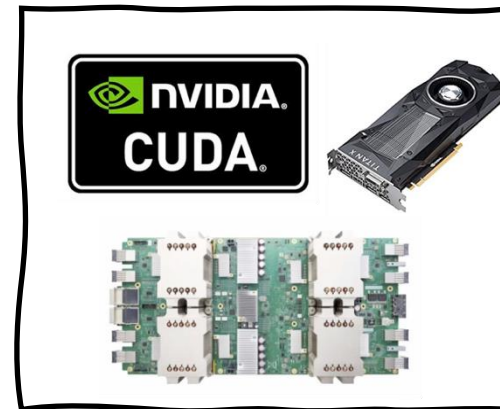
ML Research

44k lines of code

Six months



Data



Compute

Machine Learning Systems



ResNet
Transformer

ML Research

100 lines of python

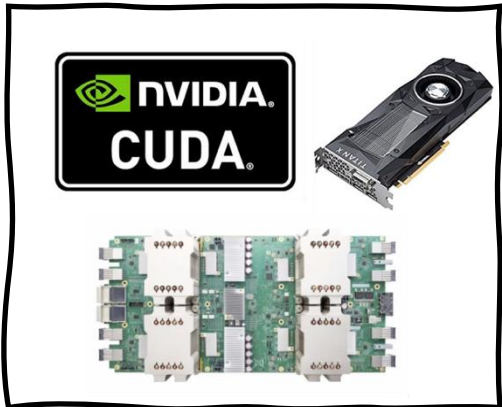
A few hours

System Abstractions

Systems (ML Frameworks)



Data

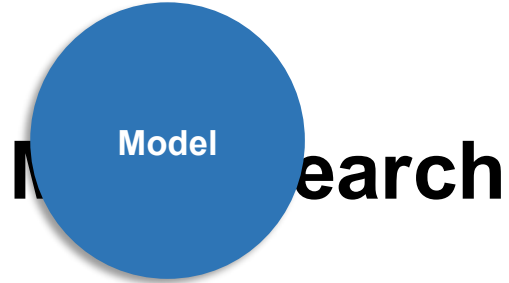


Compute

Machine Learning Systems



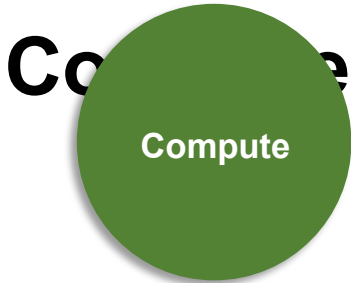
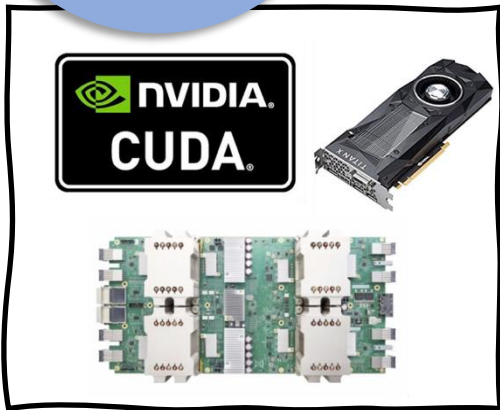
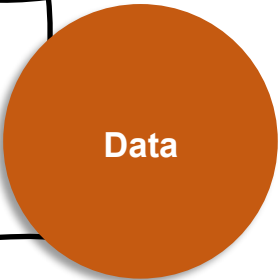
ResNet
Transformer



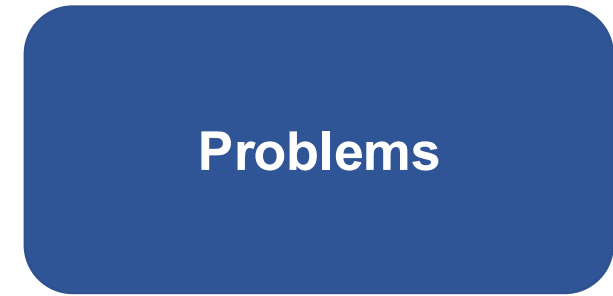
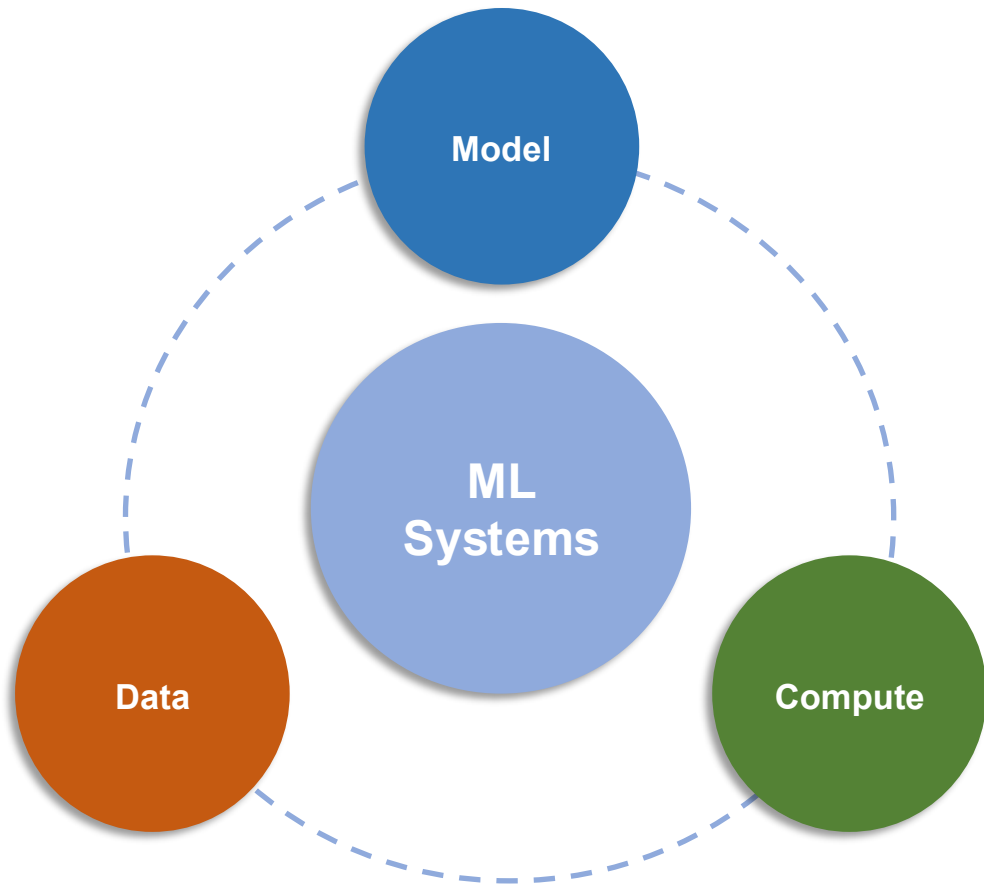
100 lines of python A few hours

System Abstraction

Systems (ML Frameworks)  **ML Systems** 



MLSys as a Research Field



A holistic approach (ML, Data, Systems, Hardware) to solve the problem of interest.

Question



Need to improve self-driving car's pedestrian detection to be **X-percent accurate**, at **Y-ms latency budget**

A Typical ML Approach



Need to improve self-driving car's pedestrian detection to be **X-percent accurate**, at **Y-ms latency budget**

Design a better model with smaller amount of compute via pruning, distillation

A Typical Systems Approach



Need to improve self-driving car's pedestrian detection to be **X-percent accurate**, at **Y-ms latency budget**

Build a better inference engine to reduce the latency and run more accurate models.

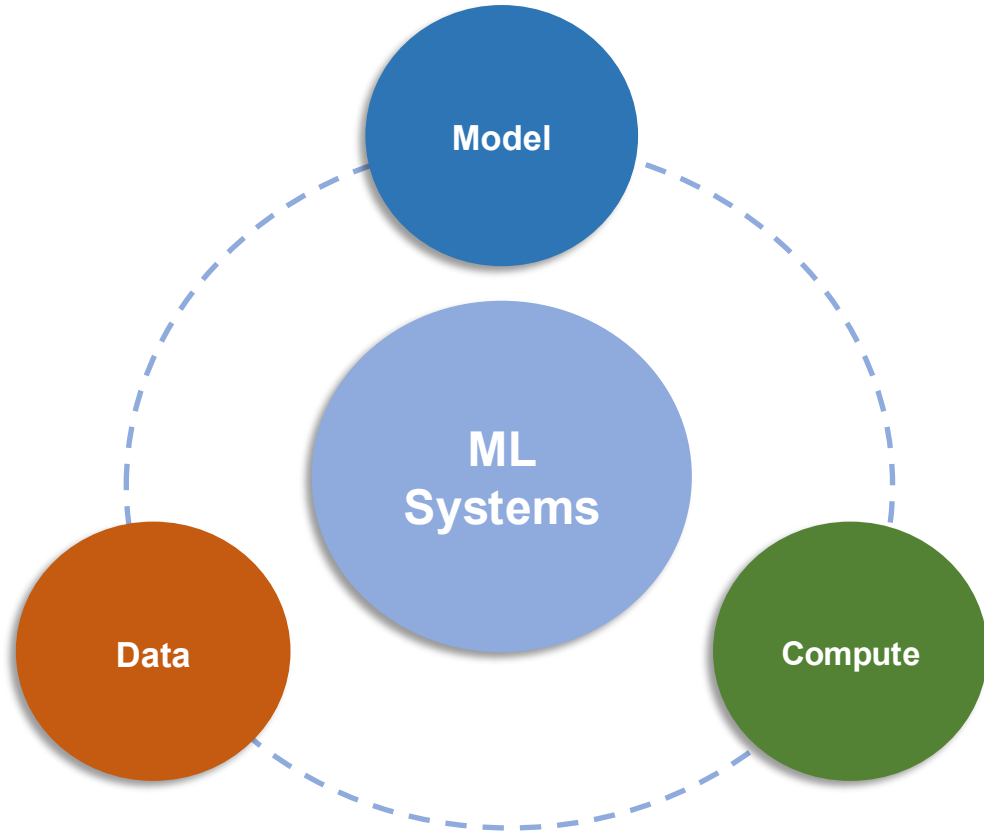
An Example MLSys Approach



Need to improve self-driving car's pedestrian detection to be **X-percent accurate**, at **Y-ms latency budget**

- Collect more **data**
- Incorporate specialized **compute** hardware
- Develop **models** that **optimizes for the specific hardware**
- Build **end-to-end systems** that makes use of the above points

MLSys as an Emerging Research Field



AI Systems Workshop at NeurIPS

MLSys tracks at Systems/DB conferences

Conference on Machine Learning and Systems ([MLSys.org](https://mlsys.org))

MLSys: The New Frontier of Machine Learning Systems

Why Study Machine Learning and Systems?

Reason #1 To push the frontier of modern AI applications, we need to have a holistic approach to the problem, understand and make use of existing systems more efficiently.

Reason #2 Prepare ourselves to build machine learning systems and work in the area of machine learning engineering.

Reason #3 Have fun building our own ML systems!

Outline

Why study machine learning systems

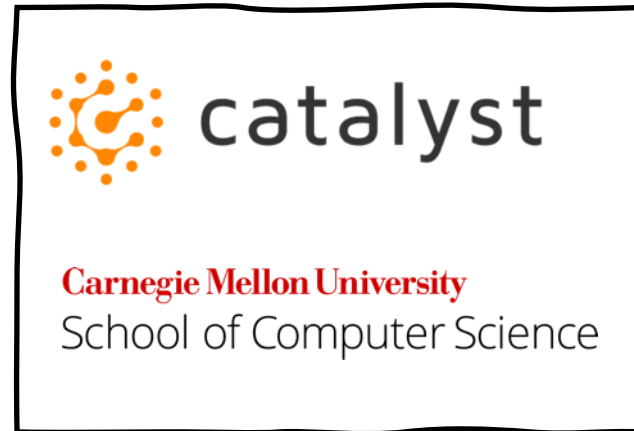
Course info and logistics

Course instructors + TAs



Tianqi Chen

Professor



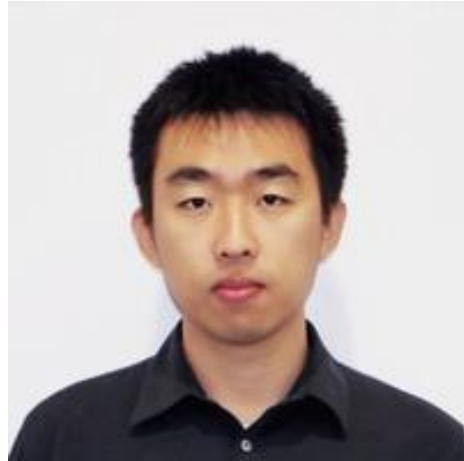
Creator of Major Learning Systems



Cook and Foodie

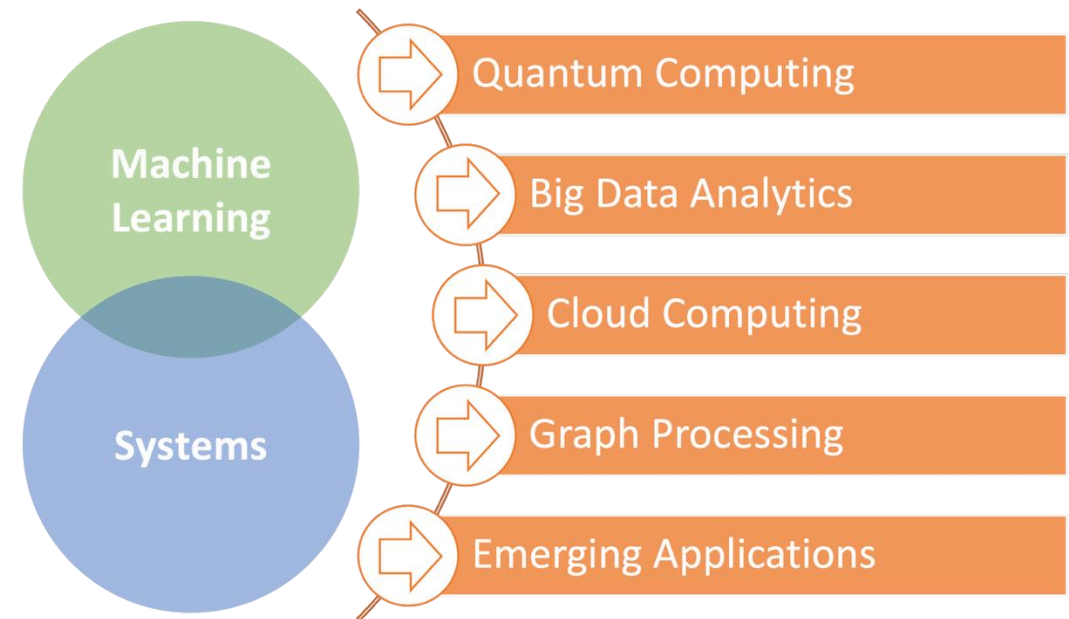
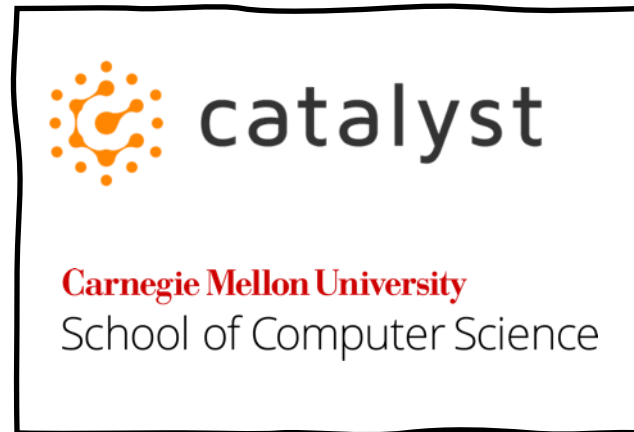


Course instructors + TAs



Zhihao Jia

Professor



TA Team



TA: [Mengdi Wu](#)
Office hours: upon request



TA: [Shushi Hong](#)
Office hours: Monday 11am-12pm, GHC 8228



TA: [Zepeng Zhao](#)
Office hours: Tuesday 10-11am, GHC 8228



TA: [Zikun Li](#)
Office hours: Tuesday 4-5pm, GHC 8228



TA: [Haojia Sun](#)
Office hours: Wednesday 2-3pm, GHC 8228



TA: [Siyuan Chen](#)
Office hours: Thursday 2-3pm, GHC 8228



TA: [Mingkuan Xu](#)
Office hours: Thursday 4-5pm, GHC 8228



TA: [Yixin Dong](#)
Office hours: Friday 10-11am, GHC 8228



TA: [Zhuoming Chen](#)
Office hours: Friday 3-4pm, GHC 8228

Big bold disclaimer

This is a third time offering of this course. We are revamping the materials to include latest advances in Machine Learning Systems.

The material and outline will likely adjust throughout the semester. There will almost certainly be some bugs in the content or assignments. By signing up for this course, you're implicitly agreeing to bear the brunt of all these issues.

Learning Objects

By the end of this course, you will ...

... understand the general components of modern machine learning frameworks, including concepts like automatic differentiation, hardware accelerations, parallelization and memory-saving techniques

... understand systems techniques for emerging generative AI applications

... implement your own machine learning systems project

Course Resources

- **Website:** <https://mlsyscourse.org>
 - Contains links to all resources
- **Piazza:** discussions and announcements
 - Links on the website, register today
- **Homework submission:** likely Gradscope and autolab, followup assignments

Prerequisites

In order to take this course, you need to be proficient with

- Systems programming (e.g., 15-213)
- Linear algebra (e.g., 21-240 or 21-241)
- basic mathematical background (21-127 or 15-151)
- Python and C++ development
- Prior experience with machine learning or AI

This is a system-focused course, so make sure you are comfortable in system programming

Components of the Course

This course will consist of four main elements

1. Class lectures
2. Programming-based (individual) assignments
3. (Group) final project
4. Interaction/discussion in piazza

Grading breakdown: 45% assignments, 45% project, 10% class participation

Final Project

In addition to homeworks, there will also be a final project, done in groups of 2-3 students. The final project contains the following components

- Proposal: 5%
- Poster presentation: 10%
- Recorded presentation: 10%
- Project report: 20%

Class Forum

Join the Piazza: Link in the course Website

At end of class, register the piazza ***using your Andrew email***

In order to receive a full participation score, you will need to be involved in at least *five* online discussions during the course

Collaboration policy

All submitted content (code and prose for homeworks and final project) should be your own content, written yourself (or written by the group members, for projects)

However, you *may* (in fact are encouraged to) discuss the homework with others in the class and on the piazza

- Use best judgement, discuss as you see fit, but don't simply share answers

Generative AI “ChatGPT” Policy

You may use code from generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT), no need to cite or specify it was from these tools.

You are ultimately responsible for anything the tools generate, including any flaws this code may contain. Content generated by LLMs that could be construed as plagiarism or scientific misconduct (e.g., fabrication of facts).

When asking questions on forums and provide answers, we encourage you to write down questions and iterate with GenAI.

Student Well-being

Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is often helpful.

In the Remaining Time...

- Sign up for the piazza **using your @andrew.cmu.edu email**
<https://piazza.com/cmu/spring2026/15442>
- Post a note in the “Say Hello” post
 1. Your name
 2. Your background and what you’re interested in learning in this course
 3. Anything cool you’ve done at al relevant to machine learning systems
- Read other people’s notes and respond if you feel like it