
Preface

Prior to 1992, research in information retrieval was limited to small test collections (on the order of several megabytes), and there was little transfer of research ideas into commercial systems. The Text REtrieval Conference (TREC) introduced the first large test collection of full-text documents, along with the idea that providing an open testing event, with common tasks and a standard evaluation scenario, would lead to the acceleration of research on a realistic scale. The ensuing twelve years of TREC have demonstrated the remarkable success of this vision. More than 225 academic, commercial, and government groups have participated in some TREC. Retrieval effectiveness on the initial task has doubled, and the paradigm has been expanded to additional tasks such as working in other languages or media. This book describes the history of TREC, including the test collections that have been built and the common evaluation methodology that has evolved. The book also includes chapters on the various tasks that have been run in TREC as well as perspectives from some of the TREC participants.

Like any large endeavor, TREC would not happen without many contributions. The program committee has been instrumental in providing solid guidance, the track coordinators have been critical in making the various tasks happen, and the contractors who have helped create the testing material over the years (the “assessors”) deserve a major thanks from the research community. Last but certainly not least, all of us would like to thank John Prange of the Advance Research and Development Activity and Charles Wayne of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency; both have provided funding for TREC over the years.

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