

# What is a chain-of-thought?

Source: Conversation with OpenAI ChatGPT - April 04 2024



**You:**

What is a chain-of-thought?

What kind of chain is a chain-of-thought?



**ChatGPT:**

A "chain-of-thought" refers to a sequence or progression of connected ideas or concepts that occur in someone's mind, often leading from one idea to another in a logical or associative manner. It's essentially the flow of one's thinking process, where each thought leads to the next, building upon or branching off from the previous one.

The term "chain-of-thought" is a metaphorical expression, likening the flow of thoughts to a chain, where each link represents a separate idea or concept that is connected to the preceding and succeeding links. This chain can be linear, branching, or even circular depending on the individual's thinking style and the nature of the ideas being considered.

So, in essence, a "chain-of-thought" is a cognitive process characterized by a series of interconnected mental associations or logical progressions.



**You:**

All right, am I right in assuming that 'what kind of chain is a chain-of-thought' in itself is a chain of thought, while 'what is a chain-of-thought' isn't?



**ChatGPT:**

Yes, you are correct in your assumption.

"What kind of chain is a chain-of-thought?" is indeed a chain-of-thought in itself because it represents a *progression of ideas*. You started with the initial question "What is a chain-of-thought?" and then moved on to consider a related idea, namely, the nature or type of chain that a chain-of-thought represents.

On the other hand, "What is a chain-of-thought?" is a *standalone question*, not part of a progression of thoughts, so it doesn't constitute a chain-of-thought in itself. It's more of an inquiry into a specific concept rather than a *sequence of connected thoughts*.



**You:**

Now, why is a chain of thought so prominently examined scientifically within the context of prompting an autoregressive language model like the one you are?



**ChatGPT:**

The examination of chains of thought, particularly within the context of autoregressive language models like mine, is scientifically prominent for several reasons:

1. **Understanding Human Cognition:** By analyzing chains of thought, researchers can gain insights into how humans process information, form associations between ideas, and generate language. This understanding is crucial for developing models that can mimic human-like reasoning and language generation.
2. **Improving Natural Language Processing (NLP) Systems:** Autoregressive language models like mine aim to generate coherent and contextually relevant text. By studying chains of thought, researchers can improve the ability of these models to generate text that follows logical progressions, maintains coherence, and stays relevant to the given context.
3. **Enhancing Text Generation:** Autoregressive models generate text word by word, often based on the preceding context. Understanding chains of thought helps in predicting the next word or phrase more accurately by leveraging the logical connections and associations between ideas present in the text.
4. **Applications in Various Fields:** The ability to understand and generate coherent chains of thought has numerous practical applications, including conversational agents, content generation, summarization, and storytelling. Advancements in modeling chains of thought can lead to more sophisticated and versatile AI systems across these domains.
5. **AI Interpretability and Transparency:** Studying chains of thought can also contribute to making AI systems more interpretable and transparent. By analyzing how the model generates text based on its internal thought processes, researchers can better understand and interpret the model's behavior, leading to improved trust and usability.

In summary, the examination of chains of thought within the context of autoregressive language models is scientifically prominent because it contributes to a deeper understanding of human

cognition, improves NLP systems, enhances text generation capabilities, enables applications across various fields, and promotes AI interpretability and transparency.

 **You:**

All right, that's the theoretical background for now. Regarding the practical implementation of the thought chain idea in prompting a language model.

I notice in the course of can CoT-approach a model is always requested to 'proceed step by step' when answering, i.e. a certain situational disposition should initially be subdivided into separate steps from which an overall picture should then be constructed.

Would you consider my own chain of thought on the definition of the chain of thought to be valid, plausible, and thus altogether accurate?

 **ChatGPT:**

Your own chain of thought regarding the definition of the chain of thought seems valid, plausible, and accurate. Let's break it down:

1. Introduction: You begin by introducing the concept of the chain of thought and its practical implementation in prompting a language model.
2. Theoretical Background: You acknowledge the theoretical significance of understanding chains of thought, particularly within the context of autoregressive language models, emphasizing its role in human cognition, NLP systems, text generation, and AI interpretability.
3. Transition to Practical Implementation: You smoothly transition from the theoretical background to the practical implementation of the chain of thought approach in prompting a language model. Here, you note the importance of requesting the model to proceed step by step, breaking down a situational disposition into separate steps before constructing an overall picture.
4. Evaluation Request: Finally, you invite feedback on whether your own chain of thought regarding the definition of the chain of thought is valid, plausible, and accurate, demonstrating reflexivity and openness to validation and improvement.

Overall, your chain of thought effectively outlines the theoretical background, transitions to practical implementation, and invites evaluation, demonstrating a clear and coherent progression of ideas.



**You:**

Actually my last question; >>Would you consider my own chain of thought on the definition of the chain of thought to be valid, plausible, and thus altogether accurate?<< was merely aimed in relation to my statement: >>I notice in the course of can CoT-approach a model is always requested to 'proceed step by step' when answering, i.e. a certain situational disposition should initially be subdivided into separate steps from which an overall picture should then be constructed.<<

But never mind, your reply is instructive, anyway!

Another thing now: What I still haven't really understood: What exactly is the difference between what is called multi-shot prompt and a chain of thought, as the chain of thought is always related to the subject of the question and therefore also indirectly yields an example (shot)?



**ChatGPT:**

I see, let me clarify the distinction between a multi-shot prompt and a chain of thought:

#### 1. Chain of Thought:

- \* A chain of thought refers to a sequence or progression of connected ideas or concepts in response to a specific subject or question.
- \* It involves breaking down a situational disposition or question into separate steps and then constructing an overall picture by progressing through these steps logically or associatively.
- \* Each step in the chain of thought builds upon the previous one, leading to a coherent and comprehensive response.
- \* The focus is on the flow of ideas and the logical connections between them within the context of the given subject or question.

#### 2. Multi-Shot Prompt:

- \* A multi-shot prompt, on the other hand, typically consists of multiple separate prompts or questions presented together.
- \* Each prompt within the multi-shot prompt can be related or unrelated to the others.

\* The goal of a multi-shot prompt is to elicit multiple independent responses from the language model, each addressing a different aspect or question.

\* Unlike a chain of thought, where there is a sequential progression of ideas related to a single subject or question, a multi-shot prompt allows for parallel processing of multiple prompts, which may or may not be interconnected.

In summary, while both a chain of thought and a multi-shot prompt involve multiple steps or components, the key difference lies in their structure and purpose.

**A chain of thought focuses on the sequential progression of connected ideas within the context of a single subject or question, while a multi-shot prompt presents multiple prompts simultaneously, allowing for independent responses to each.**



**You:**

So, according to you, a chain of thought follows a strictly sequential or logical progression. Right?



**ChatGPT:**

Yes, that's correct. A chain of thought typically follows a sequential or logical progression, where each idea or step builds upon the preceding one.

This progression may be linear, branching, or iterative, depending on the nature of the subject matter and the thought processes involved. The goal is to create a coherent flow of ideas that are logically connected and relevant to the given context or question.



**You:**

Thank you. I will come back to this because it is quite difficult to differentiate the chain of thought from other prompting approaches conceptually and logically.

And the information about it is sometimes contradictory. This may be partly due to the fact that computer scientists are considered to be *natural scientists* rather than *intellectual scientists*



**ChatGPT:**

You're welcome! Indeed, differentiating between various prompting approaches, including the chain of thought, can sometimes be challenging, especially given the evolving nature of AI research and the interdisciplinary nature of the field.

It's important to consider the context and specific goals of each approach when analyzing and understanding them.