Overview

In this project, you’ll develop some Ethereum contracts to implement decentralized auctions. This is a classic application for a smart contract platform and can be implemented (in basic form) in a very small amount of code.

You’ll construct several contracts which gradually increase in complexity and functionality. You should use Solidity, the JavaScript-like language for Ethereum, to implement each part of this project,\(^1\) using the starter code and test code provided. It’s important that you implement the interface exactly as specified, as your code will be automatically evaluated. The test code provided gives complete coverage of what you’ll be graded on, so if you can pass all tests you should be in line for full credit. Of course, grading will use modified test code with different constants, so if you just hard-code responses this will not work.

Development environments and starter code

You have two options for developing and testing your code:

- **Truffle**, a node.js-based framework for Ethereum development that you can run locally. This is slightly faster and makes it much easier to run the automated test suites. However, the debugger is trickier and it’s harder to run one-off tests.
- **Remix**, a web-based IDE for Solidity. This is quick to get up and running (no software to install!) and has many features including a GUI debugger. However, it’s quite hard to automate tests and is still somewhat unstable. Expect your browser to crash somewhat regularly.

The starter code is almost identical for either. In particular, all of the code that you write is the same in either case so you should be able to switch and/or use both. But the file TestFramework.sol is completely different for both cases.

The starter code is available here:

- Truffle version: [https://github.com/jcb82/solidityAuctionHouse](https://github.com/jcb82/solidityAuctionHouse)
- Remix version: [https://remix.ethereum.org/#gist=b36c32375581d5ac5b3650d63905404c](https://remix.ethereum.org/#gist=b36c32375581d5ac5b3650d63905404c)

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\(^1\)If you really like living on the edge, you can develop in another programming language that compiles to EVM, but you’ll need to ensure compatibility with the ABI of the Solidity starter code provided. Not for the faint of heart!
Part 1: Arbitration

TLDR: Use a designated judge to arbitrate disputes.

In class and in the textbook, we saw fair exchange Bitcoin transactions using a 2-out-of-3 multisig address and a trusted 3rd party judge. The judge can resolve disputes, but in normal cases the buyer and seller can release funds themselves. In Ethereum, there are no multisig addresses so we’ll need to achieve the same effect using a smart contract.

Our goal is to add support for a judge in a seamless way that will work for all three auction types you develop in Parts 2-4. To do this, you’ll modify the Auction.sol contract, a generic class which specific auction formats will inherit from. If a judge address is specified to your auction, that judge has the ability to call refund() after the auction is over to send the winning bidder’s money back (e.g., if the seller never shipped the item). The judge can also call finalize() to adjudicate a dispute on behalf of the seller. The arbitration should be optimistic, though, so in the normal case the buyer themselves can call finalize() to release payment (or the seller can call refund() if they are unable to provide the promised item).

If no judge is specified, then anybody may call finalize() (once the auction is over) and the money will always go to the designated seller.

Make sure that you identify the caller using msg.sender and that you don’t allow any calls before the auction is over. The judge should

Part 2: Dutch auction

TLDR: Price descends until some bidder is willing to pay it

A Dutch auction, also called an open-bid descending-price auction or clock auction, is a type of auction in which the price of the offering (the item for sale) is initially set to a very high value and then gradually lowered. The first bidder to make a bid instantly wins the offering at the current price. There may be a non-zero reserve price representing the minimum price the seller is willing to sell for. The offering can never be sold for less than the reserve price, which prevents the auction from being won at a price that is lower than what the offering’s owner is willing to accept.

For example, an in-person Dutch auction might start with the auctioneer asking for $1,000. If there are no bidders, the auctioneer might then ask for $900 and continue to lower by $100 every few moments. Eventually, (say for a price of $500), a bidder will accept and obtain the offering for this last announced price of $500.
For Part 2 you will implement a Dutch auction by filling in DutchAuction.sol. This contract will implement the auction of a single offering and will take three parameters at the time of creation (this part is already implemented in the starter code):

- the initial price
- the number of blocks the auction will be open for, including the block in which the auction is created. That is, the auction starts immediately. If the auction starts at time 7 and is the length is three, then bids may be submitted at times 7, 8, and 9.
- the (constant) rate at which the price declines per block. Note that the reserve price is implicit given the above three parameters.

Once created, anybody can submit a bid by calling this contract. When a bid is received, the contract calculates the current price by querying time() and applying the specified rate of decline in price to the original price.

**Important:** Do not call block.number or block.timestamp directly, or otherwise figure out the time using any method but calling time(), which is implemented by querying an external contract. This setup allows your code to modularly use a simple notion of time (like block.number) or a more complicated version. It also allows the test code to work. This is true for parts 3 and 4 as well.

The first bid which sends a quantity greater than or equal to the current price is the winner; the money should be immediately transferred to the seller (the party which created the contract) and the auction contract terminated. Invalid bids should be refunded immediately. If a bid is higher than the current price, the excess amount should be returned to the bidder.

*Note: Dutch auctions are rarely used in live auction houses, perhaps because they end abruptly which is less dramatic for the audience. The U.S. Treasury (among others) uses Dutch auctions to sell securities. Dutch auctions have also been used as an alternative bidding process for IPO pricing, most famously by Google. Dutch auctions are theoretically equivalent to sealed-bid first price-auctions. They are not incentive compatible, as bidders might want to wait to avoid over-paying.*

**Part 3: English auction**

**TLDR:** New bids increase the price until no new bid has been posted for a fixed number of blocks.

Dutch auctions are probably the simplest to implement in a smart contract since only one bid is needed. However, human bidders tend to like auctions with a gradually increasing price as it is more exciting (and may lead impulsive bidders to pay a higher price due to the sense of competition).

For Part 2, implement an open-bid ascending-price auction, also just called an English auction. This is the classic auction house format: the auctioneer starts with an initial offering price (the reserve price) and asks for an opening bid. Once some individual has placed a bid at or above this price, others are free to
offer a higher bid within a short time interval. This usually where the auctioneer will say “Going once, going twice...” before declaring the offering sold to the last bidder.

You’ll implement a version of this by editing EnglishAuction.sol. Like with Part 2, starter code is already provided which captures the key parameters:

- An initial price (the minimum the offering can be had for).
- A bidding period, which is the amount of time bidders have to outbid the current highest bid before the item is gone.
- A minimum increment by which any subsequent bid must increase over previous bids.

Any new bid must be higher than the current highest bid by at least the minimum bid increment. In a live English auction, the auctioneer would probably frown at you if you tried to bid $500.01 after somebody else just bid $500. Without a minimum bid increment in a smart contract, the auction might last forever as somebody drives up the price by one wei in each block.

Once created, your contract should accept bids from anybody with a value greater than or equal to the current winning bid plus the minimum bid increment. The initial bid must be the minimum price or higher. When a successful bid is placed, the money should be held by the contract and the value of the previous bid returned to the previous bidder. At the end, when a sufficient number of blocks pass with no new bids, the auction should stop accepting new bids, at which point getWinner() should return the highest bidder (requiring you to override the default implementation, which the starter code provides a stub for).

Part 4: Vickrey auction

TLDR: Bidders submit sealed bid commitments and later reveal them. Highest revealed bid wins but pays only the price of the second highest revealed bid. Bidders who don’t reveal forfeit a deposit.

The English auction format has the advantage over the Dutch auction format that the winner doesn’t always need to pay the maximum amount they would have been willing to pay—they just need to outbid the competition. The bidding process enables participants to slowly reveal their willingness to pay. However, this might take a while (particularly if the item is priced too low to start or the bid increment is made too small). By contrast, Dutch auction are faster, but the winner may end up paying more since they don’t know how much other bidders value the offering and thus may need to be conservative to ensure they win.

In response, bidders in a Dutch auction might not bid in accordance with their true willingness to pay. If they believe nobody else will bid above x, they shouldn’t bid too much above x lest they overpay. For this reason, Dutch auctions are not incentive compatible. Note that early in the course we discussed incentive compatibility in the context of Nakamoto consensus and other distributed protocols, but the concept was initially developed to describe auctions. We’re truly coming full circle!
Your final task is to implement an auction format which provides the best of both worlds: it can be arbitrarily fast, yet it is incentive compatible: all bidders are incentivized to reveal their true willingness to pay, while the winner only pays as much as they would have in an English auction. This is called a sealed-bid second-price auction or Vickrey auction. While it’s named for economist William Vickrey who first formally described it in 1961 and helped popularize it, this format has been used in practice since at least the 19th century.

An offline Vickrey auction proceeds as follows: all participants submit their bid in a sealed envelope. The auctioneer then opens all of the envelopes, and the highest bidder obtains the offering but only pays the price specified by the second-highest bidder (hence the term second-price auction). You can see intuitively why this is equivalent to the outcome an English auction would have eventually produced: this is the price the highest bidder would have needed to pay (perhaps plus a small increment) to outbid their closest competitor in an English auction.

You will implement this by editing VickreyAuction.sol. The starter code captures:

- A minimum price. Bids below this are ignored (but the deposit is returned).
- A time period to submit bid commitments.
- A time period to reveal bids.
- A bid deposit amount.

The auction will have two phases:

1. During the bid submission phase (which lasts until biddingDeadline, exclusive), anyone can submit a bid. To preserve secrecy, bidders submit a commitment to their bid, rather than the bid itself. Specifically, this commitment should be a SHA3\(^2\) hash of a 32 byte nonce and their bid value (formatted as a 32-byte array). You should make sure your code accepts the commitments generated by the provided test code. Hint: in Solidity, you can call keccak256() with an arbitrary number of inputs and their values will simply be concatenated and hashed. Bidders must also send the value specified by the bidding deposit requirement. This money is to ensure they submit a well-formed bid and eventually open their bid. If bidders send more than the deposit, the excess should be returned to the bidder. Bidders will get their deposit back in the second phase after revealing their bid.

2. In the bid opening phase (which lasts until revealDeadline exclusive) all bidders should reveal their bid by sending the nonce used in their bid commitment. They must also send the precise amount of funds to the contract to pay for their bid if they win. Any attempts to open a bid incorrectly (e.g. by sending an incorrect nonce or failing to send the correct funding value) must be rejected. Every valid bid opening should receive the bid deposit back. Security warning: make sure that only the original bidder can receive their bidding deposit back and they can only do so once.

Finally, after the bid opening phase has ended, the winner is whoever sent in the highest bid. The winning price, of course, is the second highest bid value which was revealed (or the reserve price if only

\(^2\) Solidity refers to the SHA3 hash function by its older name, Keccak256.
one valid bid was opened). After the reveal deadline has passed, the `finalize()` function will need to be called as with the English auction. Of course, if called too early it should not close the auction. The same mechanics for the judge apply, if a judge is specified.

All losing bidders (who successfully opened their bids) need to get their bid amounts refunded (in addition to their bid deposits). You may do this all in one pass at the time the auction closes, or you may optimize by doing this during the bid opening phase. If a higher bid has already been opened, losing bidders can be immediately refunded (or need not send in their actual bid amount at all). It’s up to you how you implement this, but losing bidders must be refunded.

The winner also likely also needs a refund, since they sent in the full amount of their bid but only pay the amount of the second-highest bid. This should happen when `finalize()` is called. Make sure that if there is only one bidder who opens a committed bid successfully, they are refunded the difference between their bid and the minimum price.

Note that in practice, the bid deposit should be quite high (on the order of the expected price of the offering). If it is too low, the winning bidder might try to bribe the losers not to reveal their bids, lowering the price they ultimately pay. The bid deposit should be high enough that losers are always strongly incentivized to reveal their bids. The contract may be left with surplus funds at the end due to unopened bids. You may send this to the seller or burn it. You should not send it to the winning bidder: otherwise, they can effectively use it to bribe other bidders not to open their bids.

**Deliverables**

You only need to submit only the contract files, `Auctions.sol`, `DutchAuction.sol`, `EnglishAuction.sol` and `VickreyAuction.sol`, via `classes.nyu.edu` as usual. Remember, your code will be automatically graded so it is imperative that you don’t change the API of existing functions (adding functions won’t hurt).
Truffle instructions

We have provided testing code using the Truffle development environment.

Here are the instructions to install the required dependencies and run the tests:

1. Install Node.js (if you haven’t already)
2. Install the following dependencies for this project:
   a. Truffle
   b. Mocha
   c. web3
   d. Ethereum RPC
   e. EthereumJS ABI
   f. EthereumJS Utils
   g. BigNumber

To do it all in one line:

```
    sudo npm -g install truffle mocha web3 ethereumjs-testrpc
    ethereumjs-abi ethereumjs-util bignumber
```

3. Clone or download the starter code.
4. Create a new Truffle project

   
   truffle init

5. From the starter code, you can find the appropriate files and put them into your folder.
   a. The contracts folder contains Solidity files ending in .sol. These will be the main files you edit.
   b. The test folder contains testing files, also written in Solidity. You may modify these for enhanced testing.
   c. The migrations folder contains more Javascript, which you shouldn’t need to edit.

6. Get the local test network up and running. Make sure to kill any prior testrpc process and modify the gas limit, the test cases use a lot of gas!:

   testrpc --gasLimit 100000000 &

7. To compile your code and run the provided test files. To run an individual test:

   truffle test test/ArbitrationTest.sol

To run all tests that Truffle can find:

    truffle test

Tips:

- Sometimes you run out of gas and will need to restart testrpc. This is a limit of the platform, eventually the test calling contract runs out of money.
- If your code throws an exception where the test code is not expecting it, you may get quite unhelpful feedback.
- There is a debugger, and a command line interface to get the state of a transaction. Your mileage may vary on how useful these are.
Remix instructions

Remix should work out-of-the-box in a modern browser. However, running your code is somewhat trickier. There is no simple way to run all of the tests at once (due to gas limits and other artifacts). To run a test, you’ll need to create a contract of the designated test you want to run (e.g. ArbitrationTest.sol):

You’ll probably need to manually raise the gas limit for this to work:

You’ll then need to run one of the test cases on the by clicking the name of the function to call the test function:

You’ll then need to fund this contract (which is unfortunately not possible at creation time). You can also just call the fallback function to fund the contract:

If this runs without throwing an error, it means your code is passing this test...