



---

# Accelerating Diffusion Language Models via Trajectory Distillation

Tunyu Zhang, Dimitris Metaxas (PI)

CBIM Lab, CS Department, Rutgers University

Feb 27, 2026

# Content

- Background: Diffusion Language Model (DLM)
  - Masked Diffusion Language Model (MDLM)
  - The Challenges of Few-Step Decoding
- **T3D: Trajectory Distillation via Direct Discriminative Optimization**
  - Trajectory Self-Distillation
  - DDO Objective: Reverse KL
  - Experiments
  - Theory Justification
- Future Directions

# Background: Masked Diffusion Language Model

**Auto-Regressive Model (ARM):** Generates text sequentially, token by token (next-token prediction).

**Masked Diffusion Language Model (MDLM):** Generates text by iteratively refining masked tokens in parallel. (mask predictor).

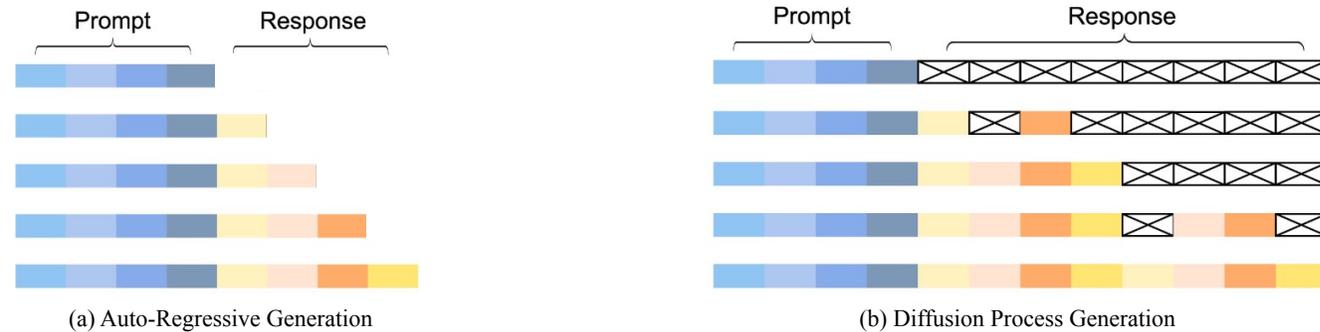


Figure: Compare the generation process of AR model (a) with DLM (b).<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] Nie, Shen, et al. "Large Language Diffusion Models." The Thirty-ninth Annual Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems.

# Background: Formulation of MDLM

**Masked Diffusion Language Model (MDLM)** [1] is a simple and efficient variant of DLM.

**The forward process:** Given a clean input  $\mathbf{x}$ , for all  $t$ , we have  $q(\mathbf{z}_t|\mathbf{x}) = \text{Cat}(\mathbf{z}_t; \alpha_t \mathbf{x} + (1 - \alpha_t) \mathbf{m})$   $\alpha_t \in [0, 1], \alpha_0 \approx 1, \alpha_1 \approx 0$

*We corrupt each token in a probability  $\alpha_t$  at different time step.*

**The Reverse process:** By the properties of MDLM, we can get a simple form of posterior  $q(\mathbf{z}_s | \mathbf{z}_t, \mathbf{x})$ , where  $s < t$

$$q(\mathbf{z}_s | \mathbf{z}_t, \mathbf{x}) = \begin{cases} \text{Cat}(\mathbf{z}_s; \mathbf{z}_t) & \mathbf{z}_t \neq \mathbf{m}, \\ \text{Cat}\left(\mathbf{z}_s; \frac{(1-\alpha_s)\mathbf{m} + (\alpha_s - \alpha_t)\mathbf{x}}{1-\alpha_t}\right) & \mathbf{z}_t = \mathbf{m}. \end{cases}$$

*We can model the reverse process by parameterization of  $\mathbf{x}_\theta$*

$$p_\theta(\mathbf{z}_s | \mathbf{z}_t) = q(\mathbf{z}_s | \mathbf{z}_t, \mathbf{x} = \mathbf{x}_\theta(\mathbf{z}_t, t)) = \begin{cases} \text{Cat}(\mathbf{z}_s; \mathbf{z}_t), & \mathbf{z}_t \neq \mathbf{m}, \\ \text{Cat}\left(\mathbf{z}_s; \frac{(1-\alpha_s)\mathbf{m} + (\alpha_s - \alpha_t)\mathbf{x}_\theta(\mathbf{z}_t, t)}{1-\alpha_t}\right). & \mathbf{z}_t = \mathbf{m}, \end{cases}$$

[1] Sahoo, Subham, et al. "Simple and effective masked diffusion language models." *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems* 37 (2024): 130136-130184.

# Background: Training of MDLM

It can yield the following NELBO:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{NELBO}}^{\infty} = \mathbb{E}_q \int_{t=0}^{t=1} \frac{\alpha'_t}{1 - \alpha_t} \log \langle \mathbf{x}_{\theta}(\mathbf{z}_t, t), \mathbf{x} \rangle dt$$

We apply masked diffusion to language modeling over sequence  $\mathbf{x}^{1:L}$  with  $L$  tokens. Here, we have to introduce a strong assumption:

**(Mean Field Assumption)**<sup>[1]</sup> *The denoising process factorizes independently across tokens*

$$p_{\theta}(\mathbf{z}_s^{1:L} | \mathbf{z}_t^{1:L}) = \prod_{\ell=1}^L p_{\theta}(\mathbf{z}_s^{\ell} | \mathbf{z}_t^{1:L})$$

With this assumption, the NELBO can be written as:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{NELBO}}^{\infty} = \mathbb{E}_q \int_{t=0}^{t=1} \frac{\alpha'_t}{1 - \alpha_t} \sum_{\ell} \log \langle \mathbf{x}_{\theta}^{\ell}(\mathbf{z}_t^{1:L}, t), \mathbf{x}^{\ell} \rangle dt$$

[1] Sahoo, Subham, et al. "Simple and effective masked diffusion language models." *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems* 37 (2024): 130136-130184.

# Background: Overview of MDLM

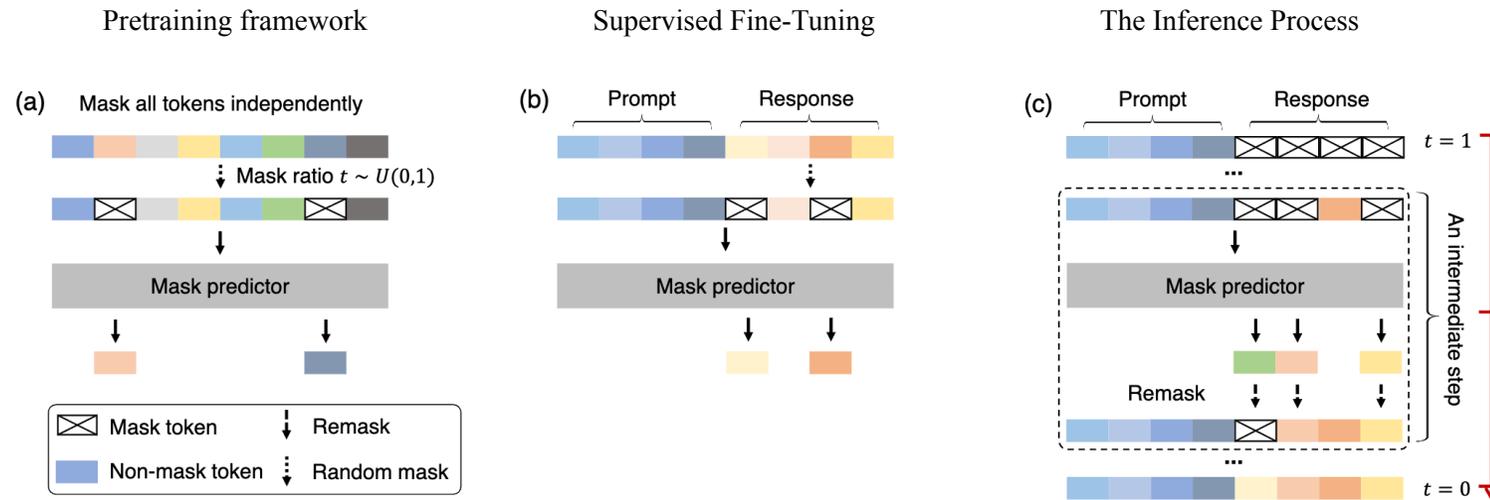
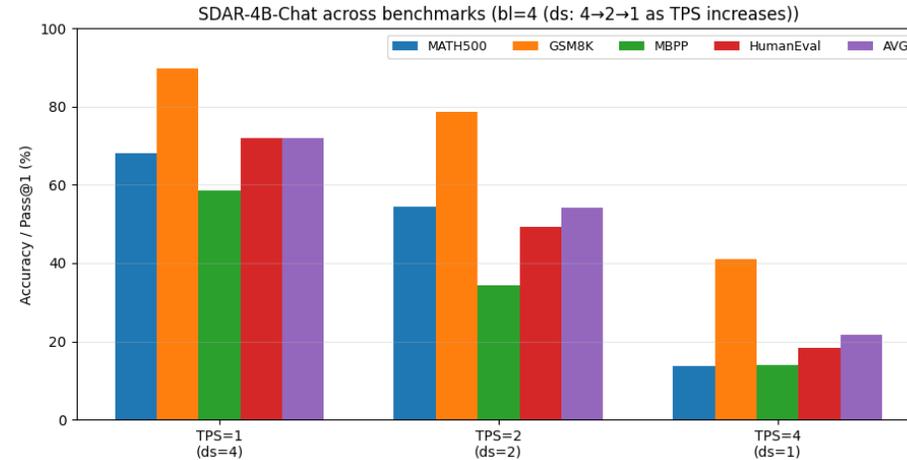


Figure: Overview of Masked Diffusion Language Model (LLaDA).<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] Nie, Shen, et al. "Large Language Diffusion Models." The Thirty-ninth Annual Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems.



# Background: The Challenges of Few-Step Decoding



**Figure: Performance degradation of SDAR-4B-Chat as tokens-per-step (TPS) increases.** As more tokens are predicted per step (with fewer decoding steps per block), accuracy consistently drops across MATH500, GSM8K, MBPP, and HumanEval. The decline becomes especially severe at TPS=4, indicating that **aggressive parallel token prediction substantially harms generation quality**.

## Why Few-Step Fails:

- Train/Test mismatch
- Factorization Error Amplification
- ...

## Why Solving Few-Step Matters:

- 🚀 Lower latency
- 💰 Lower compute cost
- 📈 Higher throughput
- ...

# Method

Recall the mean-field assumption:

**(Mean Field Assumption)** *The denoising process factorizes independently across tokens*

$$p_{\theta}(\mathbf{z}_s^{1:L} | \mathbf{z}_t^{1:L}) = \prod_{\ell=1}^L p_{\theta}(\mathbf{z}_s^{\ell} | \mathbf{z}_t^{1:L})$$

- This means we assume all tokens are independent
- **Not correct** in natural language: there should be high correlation between tokens in a sentence
- It will lead a huge approximation error in few-step generation

*Can we reduce mean-field approximation error under tight step budgets for DLLMs?*

# Method

Some previous works explored this mean-field error:

- **ReDi** (Rectified Discrete Flow<sup>[1]</sup>). **Not compatible with MDLM**
- **EDLM** (Energy-Based Diffusion Language Models For Text-Generation<sup>[2]</sup>). Need MCMC rejection sampling. **High Cost**

**T3D**: Few-Step Diffusion Language Models via Trajectory Self-Distillation with **Direct Discriminative Optimization**<sup>[3]</sup>

- A training framework for **efficient** diffusion language models.
- **T3D** uses **mode-seeking objective** to do training.
- Aggressive few-step generation while **preserving the diffusion capabilities**.
- Totally **label-free** training.

[1] Yoo, Jaehoon, et al. "ReDi: Rectified Discrete Flow." *The Thirty-ninth Annual Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems*.

[2] Xu, Minkai, et al. "Energy-Based Diffusion Language Models for Text Generation." *The Thirteenth International Conference on Learning Representations*.

[3] Zhang, Tunyu, et al. "T3D: Few-Step Diffusion Language Models via Trajectory Self-Distillation with Direct Discriminative Optimization." *arXiv preprint arXiv:2602.12262* (2026).

# T3D: Overview

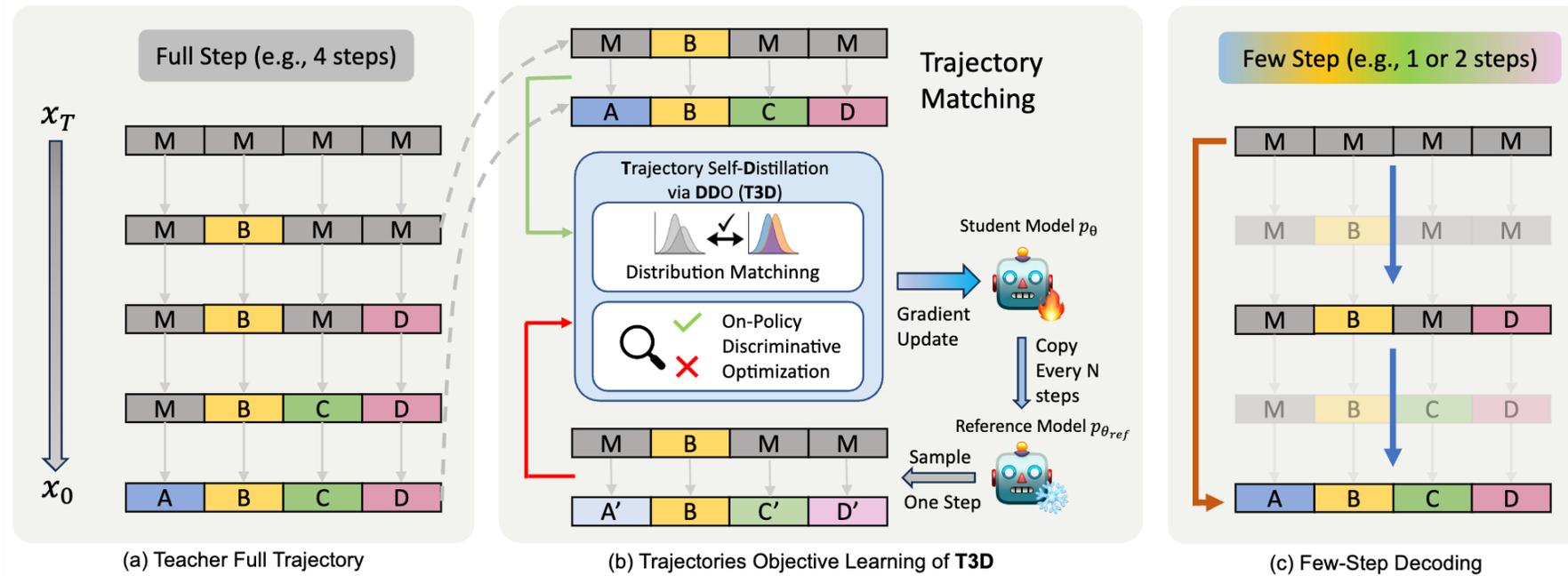


Figure: Overview of T3D for enabling few-step diffusion decoding.<sup>[1]</sup>

- (a) **Teacher full trajectory.** A pretrained diffusion language model generates sequences through a full diffusion trajectory.
- (b) **Trajectory-level objective learning.** T3D trains a few-step student model via trajectory self-distillation on teacher rollout trajectories, where **Direct Discriminative Optimization (DDO)**<sup>[1]</sup> is used to perform mode-seeking trajectory matching.
- (c) **Few-step decoding.** After training, the student can decode using significantly fewer diffusion steps (e.g., 1–2 steps per block)

[1] Zheng, Kaiwen, et al. "Direct Discriminative Optimization: Your Likelihood-Based Visual Generative Model is Secretly a GAN Discriminator." *Forty-second International Conference on Machine Learning*.

# T3D: Trajectory Self-Distillation

Given a pretrained teacher model  $p_\phi$ , which always do full-step diffusion generation, we train a few-step student model  $p_\theta$  :

1. We sample from  $p_\phi$  to collect real trajectory  $(x_0, x_1, \dots, x_T)$
2. We can draw a clean/noisy pair from this trajectory:  $(x_0, x_t)$
3. We need learn the joint distribution of  $(x_0, x_t)$

# T3D: Trajectory Self-Distillation

Given a pretrained teacher model  $p_\phi$ , which always do full-step diffusion generation, we train a few-step student model  $p_\theta$  :

1. We sample from  $p_\phi$  to collect real trajectory  $(x_0, x_1, \dots, x_T)$
2. We can draw a clean/noisy pair from this trajectory:  $(x_0, x_t)$
3. We need learn the joint distribution of  $(x_0, x_t)$

## Takeaway

- On-policy training: train on what you execute
- Remove distribution mismatch
- No architecture change required
- Label free

# T3D: DDO style Objective Training

Direct Discriminative Optimization (DDO)<sup>[1]</sup>

- A GAN-inspired objective for likelihood-based generative models
- Implicitly parameterizes the discriminator
- Reverse KL-style Objective

We adopt DDO in our framework:

*KL Objective*

$$L_{\text{traj}}(\theta) = - \mathbb{E}_{p_{\phi}(x_t)} \mathbb{E}_{x_0 \sim p_{\phi}(\cdot | x_t)} [\log p_{\theta}(x_0 | x_t)]$$

*Reverse KL Objective*

$$L_{\text{traj-DDO}}(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{x_t \sim p_{\phi}(x_t)} [l(\theta)]$$
$$l(\theta) = -\log \sigma \left( \mathbb{E}_{x_0 \sim p_{\phi}(\cdot | x_t)} \left[ \log \frac{p_{\theta}(x_0 | x_t)}{p_{\theta_{\text{ref}}}(x_0 | x_t)} \right] \right) - \log \left( 1 - \sigma \left( \mathbb{E}_{x_0 \sim p_{\theta_{\text{ref}}}(\cdot | x_t)} \left[ \log \frac{p_{\theta}(x_0 | x_t)}{p_{\theta_{\text{ref}}}(x_0 | x_t)} \right] \right) \right)$$

[1] Zheng, Kaiwen, et al. "Direct Discriminative Optimization: Your Likelihood-Based Visual Generative Model is Secretly a GAN Discriminator." *Forty-second International Conference on Machine Learning*.

# T3D: DDO style Objective Training

Direct Discriminative Optimization (DDO)<sup>[1]</sup>

- A GAN-inspired objective for likelihood-based generative models
- Implicitly parameterizes the discriminator
- Reverse KL-style Objective

We adopt DDO in our framework:

*KL Objective* ❌

$$L_{\text{traj}}(\theta) = - \mathbb{E}_{p_{\phi}(x_t)} \mathbb{E}_{x_0 \sim p_{\phi}(\cdot | x_t)} [\log p_{\theta}(x_0 | x_t)]$$



*Reverse KL Objective* ✅

$$L_{\text{traj-DDO}}(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{x_t \sim p_{\phi}(x_t)} [l(\theta)]$$
$$l(\theta) = -\log \sigma \left( \mathbb{E}_{x_0 \sim p_{\phi}(\cdot | x_t)} \left[ \log \frac{p_{\theta}(x_0 | x_t)}{p_{\theta_{\text{ref}}}(x_0 | x_t)} \right] \right) - \log \left( 1 - \sigma \left( \mathbb{E}_{x_0 \sim p_{\theta_{\text{ref}}}(\cdot | x_t)} \left[ \log \frac{p_{\theta}(x_0 | x_t)}{p_{\theta_{\text{ref}}}(x_0 | x_t)} \right] \right) \right)$$

## Takeaway

- Forward KL → mode covering
- Few-step needs confident mode-seeking
- Reverse KL / DDO encourages commitment

[1] Zheng, Kaiwen, et al. "Direct Discriminative Optimization: Your Likelihood-Based Visual Generative Model is Secretly a GAN Discriminator." *Forty-second International Conference on Machine Learning*.

# T3D: Path Consistency Regularization

We introduced a path consistency regularization:

- This is KL-style objective combined with DDO loss
- Pay more attention to early decoded tokens
- Improve overall decoding stability

$$L_{\text{path}}(\theta) = -\mathbb{E}_{p_{\phi}(x_t)} \mathbb{E}_{x_0 \sim p_{\phi}(\cdot | x_t)} \left[ \sum_i w_i (\log p_{\theta}(x_0^i | x_t^{(i)})) \right]$$

$$w_i = \frac{B - \pi_i + 1}{B}$$

where  $w_i$  is the decode order of token  $x^i$

# T3D: Overview

---

## Algorithm 1 T3D Training

---

**Require:** Teacher model  $p_\phi$

**Require:** Student model  $p_\theta$  (initialized from teacher)

**Require:** Path regularization weight  $\lambda$

1: Sample trajectory pairs  $(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_t) \sim p_\phi$

2: **repeat**

3:   Set reference model  $p_{\theta_{ref}} \leftarrow \text{StopGrad}(p_\theta)$

4:   Compute trajectory DDO loss  $\mathcal{L}_{\text{traj-DDO}}$

5:   Compute path consistency loss  $\mathcal{L}_{\text{path}}$

6:   Update student model using

$$\mathcal{L} = \mathcal{L}_{\text{traj-DDO}} + \lambda \mathcal{L}_{\text{path}}$$

7: **until** convergence

**output**  $p_\theta$

---

# Experiments: Few-Step Decoding

| TokPS                 | Method            | SD | Block Size = 4 |              |              |              | Block Size = 8 |              |              |              | Average      | Improvement (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
|                       |                   |    | MATH500        | GSM8K        | MBPP         | HumanEval    | MATH500        | GSM8K        | MBPP         | HumanEval    |              |                 |
| <b>SDAR-1.7B-Chat</b> |                   |    |                |              |              |              |                |              |              |              |              |                 |
| 2                     | Original Model    | -  | 39.40          | 63.00        | 30.40        | 32.93        | 33.60          | 55.88        | 27.80        | 37.20        | 40.03        | -               |
|                       | SFT               | ✗  | 43.00          | 61.79        | 30.00        | 34.76        | 36.80          | 62.55        | 27.20        | 37.80        | 41.74        | ↑ 4.28          |
|                       | ReDi              | ✓  | 40.60          | 63.99        | 13.20        | 16.46        | 36.40          | 62.17        | 12.80        | 13.41        | 32.38        | ↓ 19.11         |
|                       | dParallel         | ✓  | 43.40          | 68.23        | 22.20        | 24.39        | 45.20          | 67.70        | 23.20        | <b>26.83</b> | 40.14        | ↑ 0.29          |
|                       | Naive TD          | ✓  | 43.00          | 66.19        | 21.20        | 19.51        | 39.00          | 63.99        | 17.20        | 18.29        | 36.05        | ↓ 9.94          |
|                       | <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | ✓  | <b>47.00</b>   | <b>70.96</b> | <b>27.20</b> | <b>30.49</b> | <b>47.80</b>   | <b>68.84</b> | <b>26.60</b> | 25.61        | <b>43.06</b> | ↑ 7.59          |
| 4                     | Original Model    | -  | 5.00           | 13.34        | 10.60        | 12.20        | 4.80           | 12.74        | 10.20        | 10.37        | 9.91         | -               |
|                       | SFT               | ✗  | 22.40          | 36.62        | 6.20         | 5.49         | 20.00          | 39.65        | 4.40         | 7.93         | 17.84        | ↑ 80.05         |
|                       | ReDi              | ✓  | 15.00          | 32.45        | 3.40         | 5.49         | 12.80          | 29.72        | 4.00         | 4.88         | 13.47        | ↑ 35.95         |
|                       | dParallel         | ✓  | 22.80          | 45.26        | <b>10.20</b> | 12.20        | 25.40          | <b>42.91</b> | <b>10.40</b> | 11.59        | <b>22.60</b> | ↑ 128.09        |
|                       | Naive TD          | ✓  | 24.20          | <b>46.02</b> | 6.00         | <b>15.24</b> | <b>26.60</b>   | 39.73        | 9.00         | 9.76         | 22.07        | ↑ 122.78        |
|                       | <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | ✓  | <b>25.60</b>   | 42.91        | 9.40         | <b>15.24</b> | 24.40          | 37.38        | 9.20         | <b>14.02</b> | 22.27        | ↑ 124.79        |
| <b>SDAR-4B-Chat</b>   |                   |    |                |              |              |              |                |              |              |              |              |                 |
| 2                     | Original Model    | -  | 54.40          | 78.77        | 34.20        | 49.39        | 49.60          | 72.33        | 33.40        | 46.95        | 52.38        | -               |
|                       | SFT               | ✗  | 54.60          | 54.60        | 26.80        | 37.20        | 54.44          | 77.41        | 25.60        | 29.88        | 46.76        | ↓ 10.73         |
|                       | ReDi              | ✓  | 41.00          | 73.62        | 20.00        | 21.95        | 23.60          | 71.87        | 19.20        | 23.17        | 36.80        | ↓ 29.74         |
|                       | dParallel         | ✓  | 52.60          | 76.57        | 23.80        | 39.63        | 51.20          | 75.97        | 18.20        | 28.66        | 45.83        | ↓ 12.51         |
|                       | Naive TD          | ✓  | 50.80          | 72.78        | 21.40        | 24.39        | 47.00          | 68.01        | 19.60        | 22.56        | 40.82        | ↓ 22.07         |
|                       | <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | ✓  | <b>60.00</b>   | <b>83.85</b> | <b>38.80</b> | <b>51.83</b> | <b>61.60</b>   | <b>81.96</b> | <b>37.00</b> | <b>56.10</b> | <b>58.89</b> | ↑ 12.43         |
| 4                     | Original Model    | -  | 13.80          | 41.09        | 14.00        | 18.29        | 16.80          | 41.02        | 10.00        | 16.46        | 21.43        | -               |
|                       | SFT               | ✗  | 39.00          | 48.14        | 9.00         | 15.85        | 40.20          | 55.42        | 8.80         | 11.59        | 28.50        | ↑ 32.98         |
|                       | ReDi              | ✓  | 25.40          | 53.30        | 5.00         | 7.32         | 20.20          | 47.84        | 6.80         | 6.71         | 21.57        | ↑ 0.65          |
|                       | dParallel         | ✓  | 34.20          | 45.94        | 13.20        | 20.73        | 40.80          | 53.83        | 9.60         | 20.12        | 29.80        | ↑ 39.05         |
|                       | Naive TD          | ✓  | 39.00          | 57.92        | 10.40        | 17.07        | 36.20          | 50.80        | 12.40        | 9.00         | 28.92        | ↑ 34.95         |
|                       | <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | ✓  | <b>47.80</b>   | <b>69.90</b> | <b>22.60</b> | <b>23.78</b> | <b>44.80</b>   | <b>63.99</b> | <b>21.20</b> | <b>23.17</b> | <b>39.66</b> | ↑ 85.02         |

T3D consistently achieves the best or near-best performance among all self-distillation baselines

# Experiments: Full-Step Decoding Preserving

## Experimental Setting

- Study potential **diffusion behavior forgetting** after few-step distillation
- Revert distilled models back to **full-step diffusion**
- Decode using **static one-token-per-step schedule**
- Evaluate performance **without any retraining**

| Method                | MATH500      | GSM8K        | MBPP         | HumanEval    |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>SDAR-1.7B-Chat</b> |              |              |              |              |
| Original Model        | 59.40        | 80.59        | 45.20        | 59.76        |
| SFT                   | 52.00        | 73.09        | 44.20        | 60.37        |
| ReDi                  | 47.00        | 73.77        | 27.60        | 31.10        |
| dParallel             | 0.40         | 0.23         | 34.60        | 43.29        |
| Naive TD              | 49.80        | 72.40        | 35.20        | 32.93        |
| <b>T3D (Ours)</b>     | <b>56.80</b> | <b>78.01</b> | <b>41.20</b> | <b>57.32</b> |
| <b>SDAR-4B-Chat</b>   |              |              |              |              |
| Original Model        | 68.00        | 89.84        | 58.60        | 71.95        |
| SFT                   | 60.20        | 86.05        | 50.20        | 69.51        |
| ReDi                  | 50.40        | 82.03        | 34.00        | 37.80        |
| dParallel             | 13.20        | 2.88         | 34.00        | 48.17        |
| Naive TD              | 57.40        | 82.11        | 37.60        | 43.90        |
| <b>T3D (Ours)</b>     | <b>70.00</b> | <b>89.31</b> | <b>54.20</b> | <b>73.78</b> |

T3D enables few-step generation without sacrificing full diffusion performance

# Experiments: Efficiency of Dynamic Decoding

## Setting

- Evaluate under **dynamic decoding** (confidence-based adaptive decoding)
- Although T3D is trained for **static few-step**, we test real-world inference setting
- Configuration:
  - Block size = 4
  - 4 steps per block
  - Confidence threshold = 0.9
- **No additional retraining**

## Results

-  T3D improves **accuracy**
-  Reduces **average decoding steps**
-  Achieves **lower latency**
-  Delivers **higher throughput**

| Method            | TPS↑          | Latency↓    | Avg Steps↓    | Avg Len | Acc↑         |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|---------|--------------|
| MATH500           |               |             |               |         |              |
| Original          | 657.72        | 1.10        | 196.19        | 721.90  | 39.00        |
| ReDi              | 715.71        | 1.04        | 198.24        | 757.05  | 27.00        |
| dParallel         | 692.08        | 0.95        | 170.22        | 653.98  | 45.80        |
| Naive TD          | 693.85        | 0.97        | 177.99        | 678.55  | 44.00        |
| <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | <b>791.23</b> | <b>0.66</b> | <b>137.95</b> | 525.50  | <b>49.40</b> |
| GSM8K             |               |             |               |         |              |
| Original          | 580.60        | 0.43        | 71.12         | 249.52  | 61.56        |
| ReDi              | 636.58        | 0.49        | 84.63         | 311.99  | 54.89        |
| dParallel         | 805.02        | 0.39        | 83.23         | 310.58  | 67.02        |
| Naive TD          | 696.99        | 0.47        | 89.78         | 330.82  | 62.40        |
| <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | <b>843.05</b> | <b>0.37</b> | <b>83.03</b>  | 312.48  | <b>72.40</b> |
| MBPP              |               |             |               |         |              |
| Original          | 262.66        | 0.36        | 27.25         | 93.64   | 23.40        |
| ReDi              | 298.83        | 0.21        | 17.11         | 62.57   | 10.00        |
| dParallel         | 215.65        | 0.63        | 36.03         | 135.16  | 8.40         |
| Naive TD          | <b>314.99</b> | 0.31        | 26.43         | 98.80   | 9.80         |
| <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | 313.18        | <b>0.19</b> | <b>16.94</b>  | 61.62   | <b>23.60</b> |
| HumanEval         |               |             |               |         |              |
| Original          | 175.48        | 0.73        | 36.56         | 127.54  | 33.54        |
| ReDi              | 163.77        | 0.47        | 21.23         | 76.75   | 10.00        |
| dParallel         | 130.34        | 0.48        | 17.41         | 62.19   | 23.78        |
| Naive TD          | 216.39        | 0.29        | 17.15         | 62.10   | 23.17        |
| <b>T3D (Ours)</b> | <b>222.68</b> | <b>0.26</b> | <b>16.21</b>  | 58.10   | <b>29.27</b> |

T3D generalizes beyond static decoding.

# T3D: Theory Justification

## On-policy Optimum

In **Proposition 4.3**, we defined a *on-policy risk for distillation*:

$$\mathcal{R}_t(\theta) := \mathbb{E}_{\mathbf{x}_t \sim p_\phi(\mathbf{x}_t)} \left[ D(p_\phi(\cdot | \mathbf{x}_t) \| p_\theta(\cdot | \mathbf{x}_t)) \right]$$

We can prove the optimal solution of T3D is the optimal solution for this risk:

$$\mathcal{R}_t(\theta_{\text{Tra}}^*) \leq \mathcal{R}_t(\theta^*).$$

## Intuition

- Student is trained under the same intermediate-state distribution encountered at inference time
- This ensures on-policy alignment with the teacher
- Avoids mismatch caused by marginal-only (random mask) training

# T3D: Theory Justification

## Reduce mean-field (factorization) error

Following the definition in ReDi, the Conditional Total Correlation (TC) measures the factorization error:

$$TC_J(\mathbf{x}_s | \mathbf{x}_t) := \mathbb{E}_{\mathbf{x}_t} \left[ \text{KL} \left( p(\mathbf{x}_s | \mathbf{x}_t) \parallel \prod_{i=1}^N p(\mathbf{x}_s^i | \mathbf{x}_t) \right) \right]$$

In **Theorem 4.5**, we proved T3D can induce lower Conditional Total Correlation

$$\mathbb{E}_t \left[ TC_{J_{\theta^*}^{\text{Tra}}}(x_0 | x_t) + TC_{J_{\theta^*}^{\text{Tra}}}(x_t | x_T) \right] \leq \mathbb{E}_t \left[ TC_{J_{\phi}^{\text{Tra}}}(x_0 | x_t) + TC_{J_{\phi}^{\text{Tra}}}(x_t | x_T) \right]$$

## Intuition

- Trains the student on full joint trajectory states
- T3D encourages internal consistency across tokens
- Reduces conditional total correlation

# Future Directions

- Summary
  - **Distribution Alignment** → train on what you execute
  - **Objective Alignment** → optimize for few-step behavior
- Next Steps
  - Task/Domain specific distillation
  - Larger and better datasets
  - Incorporate Reinforcement Learning
  - Scale up to larger and stronger models

# References

- [1] Nie, Shen, et al. "Large Language Diffusion Models." *The Thirty-ninth Annual Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems*.
- [2] Li, Tianyi, et al. "A survey on diffusion language models." *arXiv preprint arXiv:2508.10875* (2025).
- [3] Yoo, Jaehoon, et al. "ReDi: Rectified Discrete Flow." *The Thirty-ninth Annual Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems*.
- [4] Xu, Minkai, et al. "Energy-Based Diffusion Language Models for Text Generation." *The Thirteenth International Conference on Learning Representations*.
- [5] Zhang, Tunyu, et al. "T3D: Few-Step Diffusion Language Models via Trajectory Self-Distillation with Direct Discriminative Optimization." *arXiv preprint arXiv:2602.12262* (2026).
- [6] Zheng, Kaiwen, et al. "Direct Discriminative Optimization: Your Likelihood-Based Visual Generative Model is Secretly a GAN Discriminator." *Forty-second International Conference on Machine Learning*.

**Thanks**

**R**

**RUTGERS  
UNIVERSITY**