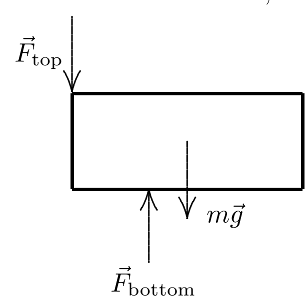
34. We locate the origin of the x axis at the edge of the table and choose rightwards positive. The criterion (in part (a)) is that the center of mass of the block above another must be no further than the edge of the one below; the criterion in part (b) is more subtle and is discussed below. Since the edge of the table corresponds to $x = 0$ then the total center of mass of the blocks must be zero.

(a) We treat this as three items: one on the upper left (composed of two bricks, one directly on top of the other) of mass $2m$ whose center is above the left edge of the bottom brick; a single brick at the upper right of mass m which necessarily has its center over the right edge of the bottom brick (so $a_1 = L/2$ trivially); and, the bottom brick of mass m. The total center of mass is

$$\frac{(2m)(a_2 - L) + ma_2 + m(a_2 - L/2)}{4m} = 0$$

which leads to $a_2 = 5L/8$. Consequently, $h = a_2 + a_1 = 9L/8$.

(b) We have four bricks (each of mass m) where the center of mass of the top and the center of mass of the bottom one have the same value $x_{cm} = b_2 - L/2$. The middle layer consists of two bricks, and we note that it is possible for each of their centers of mass to be beyond the respective edges of the bottom one! This is due to the fact that the top brick is exerting downward forces (each equal to half its weight) on the middle blocks – and in the extreme case, this may be thought of as a pair of concentrated forces exerted at the innermost edges of the middle bricks. Also, in the extreme case, the support force (upward) exerted on a middle block (by the bottom one) may be thought of as a concentrated force located at the edge of the bottom block (which is the point about which we compute torques, in the following). If (as indicated in our sketch, where $\vec{F}_{\text{top}}$ has magnitude $mg/2$) we consider equilibrium of torques on the rightmost brick, we obtain



$$mg\left(b_1 - \frac{1}{2}L\right) = \frac{mg}{2}(L - b_1)$$

which leads to $b_1 = 2L/3$. Once we conclude from symmetry that $b_2 = L/2$ then we also arrive at $h = b_2 + b_1 = 7L/6$.