Web Scraping With Beautiful Soup in Python

Web Scraping is a technique employed to extract large amounts of data from websites whereby the data is retrieved and saved to a local file in your computer or to a database in a table (spreadsheet) format. This process of web scraping can be a time-consuming as it requires us to know the layout of the document and isolate the items. However, Python users have access to a robust library that makes the process of web scraping easy & quick. The name of this library is BeautifulSoup and comes preinstalled on the Anaconda platform.

In this tutorial, we will explore how to use this library to scrape a Wikipedia page for data.

Tip: If you do not have `BeautifulSoup` installed on Python simply run the follwing pip command `pip install beautifulsoup4`.

Section One: Getting the Web Page Content

The first thing we will do is import the libraries and modules. The most obvious one is the BeautifulSoup library as this is the library we will be using to scrape the page. However, to get the HTML content of the web page, we will need one more library; the urllib.request Library. This library is used to open the URL we want to scrape and then pass the HTML content of that page into the Beautiful Soup parser.

```
In [1]: # beautiful soup libraries
        from bs4 import BeautifulSoup
        from urllib.request import Request, urlopen
        import urllib.request
```

With our libraries & modules imported, let's get started by defining the webpage URL & then requesting it. Once we have our request object, we can pass it through our BeautifulSoup object, while making sure to specify the html.parser as the content of the response object is HTML. The loading process is the real beauty of the BeautifulSoup library, as it handles all the content for use behind the scenes.

```
In [2]: # Define & request the url that we want to scrape
        wiki_url = r"https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Front_(World_War_II)"
        html content = urllib.request.urlopen(wiki url)
        # Pass the html content(the webpage) through our beautiful soup object
        soup = BeautifulSoup(html content, 'html.parser')
```

Once the content is loaded, we have a new BeautifulSoup object that we can easily traverse. Here is a simple example where we use the find method to find the first a tag in our HTML code. Now, we can make our search a little more narrow by defining an attribute we want to identify. In this example, I want the href attribute to exist in my a tag.

```
In [3]: # find the first `a` tag that has an `href` attribute.
        link = soup.find('a', href=True)
        display(link)
```

<a href="/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection_policy#semi" title="This article is semi-</pre> protected until June 21, 2019 at 18:17 UTC.">

Section Two: Tag Objects

It's not apparent at first, but any object that we look for is returned to us as another object that has specific properties about it. To be more explicit, it's a beautiful soup tag object. This particular object has particular features that make retrieving different portions of it more manageable.

- name: This is the name of the tag.
- text: This is the readable text of the label if there is any.
- · attrs: This returns a dictionary of each attribute behaving as the key and the corresponding info as the value.

To access any of the attributes, we call the object and then pass through the key which will return the value.

```
In [4]: # what is the type.
        display(type(link))
        # define the name.
        display(link.name)
        # get the dictionary attribute.
        display(link.attrs)
        # lets get each value in that dictionary, luckily there is only 2.
        display(link['href'])
        display(link['title'])
        # we can also get the text, if there is any. In this case there wasn't any tex
        t to return so it just returns an empty string.
        display(link.text)
        bs4.element.Tag
        'a'
        { 'href': '/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection policy#semi',
          'title': 'This article is semi-protected until June 21, 2019 at 18:17 UTC.'}
         '/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection_policy#semi'
        'This article is semi-protected until June 21, 2019 at 18:17 UTC.'
```

Section Three: Finding Tags & Content

We've seen how to search for one tag, but what if want to search for multiple tags of the same type. Well, this is almost identical to searching for one tag we change the method we use to find all. In this example, I use find all to find all the a tags in the document, I still only want the ones that have a link, so I keep the href attribute set to the value True.

```
In [5]: # find all the links in the document.
        links = soup.find all('a', href=True)
        # what is the type of this links object, it should be a bs4.element.ResultSet.
        display(type(links))
        # we can iterate through this result set using a for loop. In this loop I grab
        the href and limit the result sets to 10 items.
        for link in links[0:10]:
            print(link['href'])
        bs4.element.ResultSet
```

```
/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection_policy#semi
#mw-head
#p-search
/wiki/Great_Patriotic_War_(term)
/wiki/The Great Patriotic War (The Americans)
/wiki/Patriotic War of 1812
/wiki/European theatre of World War II
/wiki/World_War_II
/wiki/File:EasternFrontWWIIcolage.png
/wiki/Ilyushin Il-2
```

We've seen how using find all can make the process of getting the tags we want significantly easier. However, we just looked at some simple examples. This particular method is very flexible as it allows us to find some of the following:

- · Multiple Tags
- Tags with specific attributes
- · Tags with specific attributes & attribute values.
- · Using functions to narrow our search.

Here are some more "advanced" examples of using find all.

```
In [6]: # return a list of all the  & and <a> tag
        tables and links = soup.find all(['a', 'table'])
        # return a list of all the  tag with a 'content' attribute
        tables with cont = soup.find all('th', style="width: 10%;")
        # return a list of all the <div> tags that have a class attribute of 'navbox'
        div with nav = soup.find all('div', 'navbox')
        # define a function to find the item
        def list with links(tag):
            return tag.name == 'li' and len(tag.find_all('a'))> 7
        # use the function with find all
        list_items_with_links = soup.find_all(list_with_links)
```

Section Four: The Beautiful Soup Family Tree

Navigating the HTML tree is pretty simple, once you understand it's relationship to other elements in the document. For example, multiple items can fall under the same tag. Take, for example, a simple document provided by BeautifulSoup

```
<html>
  <body>
   <a>>
    <b>
     text1
    </b>
    <c>
     text2
    </c>
   </a>
  </body>
 </html>
```

Let's explore the different types of relationships available to us in the BeautifulSoup library.

```
In [7]: # define the simple tree we see above.
         simple_tree = """<html><body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body></html>"""
         # pass the simple tree into our Parser to create some simple soup.
         simple_soup = BeautifulSoup(simple_tree, 'html.parser')
         # we can always print it in a familiar structure.
         print(simple_soup.prettify())
         <html>
         <body>
           <a>>
            <b>
            text1
            </b>
            <c>
            text2
            </c>
           </a>
         </body>
         </html>
```

Going down the tree: Children

We notice that in our HTML code above that we have tags within tags, the tags contained in other tags are the Children and in Beautiful Soup we have different ways for moving through these children. If you look at the simple tree above, both tag b and tag c are children of the tag a. Let's see how we can access those children.

```
In [8]: # if we want just a list of the children we could use the Contents attribute
        a_content = simple_soup.a.contents
        # display the list
        display(a_content)
        # display the first child
        display(a_content[0])
        # if we want to create a generator to iterate over them vice a list we can use
        the `children` attribute
        for child in simple_soup.a.children:
            display(child)
        [<b>text1</b>, <c>text2</c>]
        <b>text1</b>
        <b>text1</b>
        <c>text2</c>
```

Going down the tree: Descendants

When using the contents & childrens attribute, we are only considering tags direct children, the ones that fall underneath that tag. However, if wanted all the tags beneath the children we would need to use the descendants attribute. The descendants attribute returns not just the children, but the children within the children.

```
In [9]: # let's first verify there is a difference
        display(len(list(simple soup.a.children)))
        display(len(list(simple soup.a.descendants)))
        # greate so we know there is a difference, lets iterate through the descendant
        for descendant in simple soup.a.descendants:
            print(descendant)
        2
        4
        <b>text1</b>
        text1
        <c>text2</c>
        text2
```

Going up the tree: Parent & Parents

We now see that we can access the tags that are direct descendants of the tag in question. We refer to the accessing of these tags as going down the tree. If we can go down the tree, we should be able to go up the tree right? Correct, this is possible using the parent & parents attribute. The parent is the tag that contains the tag we are referring to. Here is how we access the parent/parents:

```
In [10]: # Lets see if tag `a` has a parent
         display(simple_soup.a.parent)
         # is there a parent of the parent?
         display(simple_soup.a.parent.parent)
         # looks like there is, but we can write this more concisely using a generator
          along with a for loop
         for parent in simple soup.a.parents:
             print(parent)
         <body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body>
         <html><body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body></html>
         <body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body>
         <html><body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body></html>
         <html><body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body></html>
```

Going Sideways

In the simple tree up above, we would consider that element
b> and element <c> are siblings because they both fall under the same a tag element the parent. The a tag signifies that means we can navigate between the two using the next sibling & previous sibling properties. When we go from one sibling to the next, we are said to be going sideways because they both exist under the same tag.

```
In [11]: | # grab the b tag
         display(simple soup.b)
         # grab the next sibling, this should be the c tag.
         display(simple soup.b.next sibling)
         # grab the previous sibling, this should be the b tag.
         display(simple soup.c.previous sibling)
         # if I call 'previous_sibling' on the b tag it will return none, that's becaus
         e the 'b' tag has no siblings before it
         # grab the next sibling, this should be the c tag.
         display(simple_soup.b.previous_sibling)
         <b>text1</b>
         <c>text2</c>
         <b>text1</b>
         None
In [12]: # grab the first paragraph, and then get it's sibling
         display(soup.p.next sibling)
         display(soup.p.next sibling.next sibling)
         # define the bottom
         bottom = soup.p.next sibling.next sibling
         # grab the first paragraph, and then get it's sibling
         display(bottom.previous sibling)
         display(bottom.previous_sibling.previous_sibling)
         '\n'
         <div class="hatnote navigation-not-searchable" role="note">"Great Patriotic W
         ar" redirects here. For a discussion of the term itself, see <a href="/wiki/G
         reat Patriotic War (term)" title="Great Patriotic War (term)">Great Patriotic
         War (term)</a>. For the episode of The Americans, see <a href="/wiki/The Grea
         t_Patriotic_War_(The_Americans)" title="The Great Patriotic War (The American
         s)">The Great Patriotic War (The Americans)</a>.</div>
```

Going back & forth

One of the simplest ways to navigate our simple tree is to use the next_element and the previous_element properties. All these two properties do is proceed down from top to bottom. If I want to go forward down my tree, I will use next element and if I wanted to go backward up my tree I would specify the previous element. Keep in mind that you don't have started at the beginning of the code to start traversing it, you can call the tag you want to start at and then go down.

Tip: Now a lot of people ask this, "What's the difference between the next element versus the next sibling?". The answer is simple when we talk about the next element we mean the next item that Beautiful Soup parsed. Just because it was the next item parsed does not mean it's a sibling.

```
In [13]: # grab the body
         display(simple_soup.body)
         # grab the next element after the body, which would be the 'a' tag.
         display(simple soup.body.next element)
         # keep going forward
         display(simple_soup.body.next_element.next_element)
         <body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body>
         <a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a>
         <b>text1</b>
In [14]:
         # grab the b tag
         display(simple soup.b)
         # grab the PREVIOUS element after the body, which would be the 'a' tag.
         display(simple_soup.b.previous_element)
         # keep going backwards
         display(simple_soup.b.previous_element.previous_element)
         <b>text1</b>
         <a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a>
         <body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body>
```

```
In [72]: # let's do an example with one of our tables
         my table = soup.find all('table')[5]
         # using next element
         display(my_table.next_element)
         display(my_table.next_element.next_element)
         # using previous element
         display(my table.previous element)
         display(my_table.previous_element.previous_element)
         '\n'
         <caption>Comparative strengths of combat forces, Eastern Front, 1941-1945<sup</pre>
         class="reference" id="cite ref-37"><a href="#cite note-37">[37]</a></sup><sup
         class="reference" id="cite ref-FOOTNOTEGlantz1998107 38-0"><a href="#cite not
```

e-FOOTNOTEGlantz1998107-38">[38]</sup>^{[39]} </caption>

'\n'

', leader of the Free French, who thought that it was important for French se rvicemen to serve on all fronts.\n'

Sibling & Element Generators

What if I want all the siblings or all the next/previous elements that belong to a particular tag? Well up above, I made the process a little more complicated then it had to. What we could've done up above is instead of writing next sibling.next sibling we could've just called the next siblings iterator to simple fetch all the siblings of that particular tag, and then we could iterate through each one of them. Here is how the above examples would look if we chose to follow that path:

```
In [16]: # grab the body
         display(simple soup.body)
         # create a next elements generator
         display(simple_soup.body.next_elements)
         # loop through each element in the generator.
         for element in simple soup.body.next elements:
             display(element)
         <body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body>
         <generator object next_elements at 0x00000157EE55C468>
         <a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a>
         <b>text1</b>
         'text1'
         <c>text2</c>
         'text2'
In [17]:
         # grab the b tag
         display(simple_soup.b)
         # create a previous elements generator
         display(simple_soup.b.previous_elements)
         # loop through each element in the generator.
         for element in simple_soup.b.previous_elements:
             display(element)
         <b>text1</b>
         <generator object previous_elements at 0x00000157EDDDDFC0>
         <a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a>
         <body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body>
         <html><body><a><b>text1</b><c>text2</c></a></body></html>
```

More Wikipedia Examples

Okay, so now that we know, the whole structure of our tree let's put it to work. In the example below I will find all the tables in my soup, specify the sixth one because I like that one, and then create all of my necessary generators.

```
In [67]: # get my table
        table = soup.find all('tr')[5]
        # define my generators
        the parents = table.parents
        the_children = table.children
        the descendants = table.descendants
        next sibs = table.next siblings
        prev_sibs = table.previous_siblings
        next elem = table.next elements
        prev_elem = table.previous_elements
In [36]: for child in list(the children):
           print('-----')
           print(child)
        Location
        _____
        <div class="location">Europe east of Germany: <a href="/wiki/Central_and_
        Eastern Europe" title="Central and Eastern Europe">Central and Eastern Europe
        </a>, in later stages Germany and Austria</div>
In [37]: for descendant in the descendants:
           print('-----')
           print(descendant)
        ______
        Location
         -----
        Location
        <div class="location">Europe east of Germany: <a href="/wiki/Central and
        Eastern Europe" title="Central and Eastern Europe">Central and Eastern Europe
        </a>, in later stages Germany and Austria</div>
        -----
        <div class="location">Europe east of Germany: <a href="/wiki/Central_and_East</pre>
        ern_Europe" title="Central and Eastern Europe">Central and Eastern Europe</a
        >, in later stages Germany and Austria</div>
        Europe east of Germany:
        <a href="/wiki/Central_and_Eastern_Europe" title="Central and Eastern Europ
        e">Central and Eastern Europe</a>
        -----
        Central and Eastern Europe
         ______
        , in later stages Germany and Austria
```

```
In [44]: for sib in next sibs:
         print('----')
         print(sib)
```

Result Soviet victory

Fall of the Third Reich

<a class="mw-redirect" href="/wiki/Allied_occupation_of_Germany" title="A</pre> llied occupation of Germany">Allied occupation of Germany

>Beginning of the Cold War a nd creation of the Eastern Bloc and the Iron Curta in

>Beginning of the Greek Civil War

Territorial
changes

The Soviet Union occupies <a href="/wiki/Central_Europe" title="Central E</pre> urope">Central, Eas tern, Northeastern and Southeastern Europe and esta blishes pro-Soviet co mmunist puppet governme nts in countries including <a href="/wiki/People%27s_Republic_of_Bulgari</pre> a" title="People's Republic of Bulgaria">Bulgaria, Czechoslova kia, <a href="/wiki/Hungarian_People%27s_Republic" title="Hungarian Peopl

="Polish People's Republic">Poland, Romania, a nd Eastern Germany. >

e's Republic">Hungary, <a href="/wiki/Polish People%27s Republic" title

Establishment of the <a class="mw-redirect" href="/wiki/Federal_People%27</pre> s Republic of Yugoslavia" title="Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia">Fed eral People's Republic of Yugoslavia

Partition of Germany

<a href="/wiki/Territorial changes of Poland immediately after World War II" title="Territorial changes of Poland immediately after World War II">Bord ers of Poland changed.

```
In [45]:
      for sib in prev sibs:
         print('----')
         print(sib)
```

Date22 June 1941 (1941-06-22)</s pan> - 25 May 1945 (1945-05-25)^{[2]}
<(3 years, 11 months and 3 days)</ td>

```
In [68]: # just for speed purposes, let's only do a few next elements
       next_list = list(next_elem)
       for elem in next_list[0:2]:
          print('----')
          print(elem)
       Location
       Location
In [70]:
      # just for speed purposes, let's only do a few previous elements
       prev_list = list(prev_elem)
       for elem in prev_list[0:2]:
          print('----')
          print(elem)
       (3 years, 11 months and 3 days)
         <br/>
```

```
In [69]: # just for speed purposes, let's only do a few parents
        par_list = list(the_parents)
        for parent in par_list[0:2]:
           print('----')
           print(parent)
```

Date22 June 1941 (1941-06-22</sp an>) - 25 May 1945 (1945-05-25)^{[2]}
(3 years, 11 months and 3 d ays)Location<div class ="location">Europe east of Germany: Central and Eastern Europe, in late r stages Germany and Austria</div><th style="padding-right:1e" m">Result

Soviet victory

Fall of the Third Reich

Allied occupation of Germany

>Beginning of the Cold War a nd creation of the Eastern Bloc and the Iron Curta in

Beginning of the Greek Civil WarTerr itorial
changes

The Soviet Union occupies <a href="/wiki/Central_Europe" title="Central E urope">Central, Eas tern, Northeastern and Southeastern Europe and esta blishes pro-Soviet co mmunist puppet governme nts in countries including Bulgaria, Czechoslova kia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, a nd Eastern Germany.</li

Establishment of the <a class="mw-redirect" href="/wiki/Federal_People%27</pre> s Republic of Yugoslavia" title="Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia">Fed eral People's Republic of Yugoslavia

Partition of Germany

Bord ers of Poland changed.

<th style="p adding-right:1em">Date22 June 1941 (1941-06-22) - 25 May 194 5 (19 45-05-25)^{[2]}
<(3 years, 11 months and 3 days)</td><th st yle="padding-right:1em">Location<div class="location">Europe east of Germany: <a href="/wiki/Central_and_Eastern_Europe" title="Central and Easter</pre> n Europe">Central and Eastern Europe, in later stages Germany and Austria </div>style="padding-right:1em">Result Soviet victory

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Establishment of the <a class="mw-redirect" href="/wiki/Federal People%27</pre> s_Republic_of_Yugoslavia" title="Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia">Fed eral People's Republic of Yugoslavia

<a href="/wiki/History_of_Germany_(1945%E2%80%931990)" title="History of</pre> Germany (1945-1990)">Partition of Germany

<a href="/wiki/Territorial_changes_of_Poland_immediately_after_World_War_</pre> II" title="Territorial changes of Poland immediately after World War II">Bord ers of Poland changed.