

# numpy.i: a SWIG Interface File for NumPy

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## Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Using numpy.i](#)

[Available Typemaps](#)

[Input Arrays](#)

[In-Place Arrays](#)

[Argout Arrays](#)

[Output Arrays](#)

[Other Common Types: bool](#)

[Other Common Types: complex](#)

[Helper Functions](#)

[Macros](#)

[Routines](#)

[Beyond the Provided Typemaps](#)

[A Common Example](#)

[Other Situations](#)

[A Final Note](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

## Introduction

The Simple Wrapper and Interface Generator (or [SWIG](#)) is a powerful tool for generating wrapper code for interfacing to a wide variety of scripting languages. [SWIG](#) can parse header files, and using only the code prototypes, create an interface to the target language. But [SWIG](#) is not omnipotent. For example, it cannot know from the prototype:

```
double rms(double* seq, int n);
```

what exactly `seq` is. Is it a single value to be altered in-place? Is it an array, and if so what is its length? Is it input-only? Output-only? Input-output? `SWIG` cannot determine these details, and does not attempt to do so.

Making an educated guess, humans can conclude that this is probably a routine that takes an input-only array of length `n` of `double` values called `seq` and returns the root mean square. The default behavior of `SWIG`, however, will be to create a wrapper function that compiles, but is nearly impossible to use from the scripting language in the way the C routine was intended.

For `python`, the preferred way of handling contiguous (or technically, *strided*) blocks of homogeneous data is with the module `NumPy`, which provides full object-oriented access to arrays of data. Therefore, the most logical `python` interface for the `rms` function would be:

```
def rms(seq):
```

where `seq` would be a `NumPy` array of `double` values, and its length `n` would be extracted from `seq` internally before being passed to the C routine. Even better, since `NumPy` supports construction of arrays from arbitrary `python` sequences, `seq` itself could be a nearly arbitrary sequence (so long as each element can be converted to a `double`) and the wrapper code would internally convert it to a `NumPy` array before extracting its data and length.

`SWIG` allows these types of conversions to be defined via a mechanism called *typemaps*. This document provides information on how to use `numpy.i`, a `SWIG` interface file that defines a series of *typemaps* intended to make the type of array-related conversions described above relatively simple to implement. For example, suppose that the `rms` function prototype defined above was in a header file named `rms.h`. To obtain the `python` interface discussed above, your `SWIG` interface file would need the following:

```
%{
#define SWIG_FILE_WITH_INIT
#include "rms.h"
%}

#include "numpy.i"

%init %{
import_array();
%}

%apply (double* IN_ARRAY1, int DIM1) {(double* seq, int n)};
#include "rms.h"
```

*Typemaps* are keyed off a list of one or more function arguments, either by type or by type and name. We will refer to such lists as *signatures*. One of the many *typemaps* defined by `numpy.i` is used above and has the signature `(double* IN_ARRAY1, int DIM1)`. The argument names are intended to suggest that the `double*` argument is an input array of one dimension and that the `int` represents that dimension. This is precisely the pattern in the `rms` prototype.

Most likely, no actual prototypes to be wrapped will have the argument names `IN_ARRAY1` and `DIM1`. We use the `%apply` directive to apply the *typemap* for one-dimensional input arrays of type `double` to the actual prototype used by `rms`. Using `numpy.i` effectively, therefore, requires knowing what *typemaps* are available and what they do.

Note that if the C function signature was in a different order:

```
double rms(int n, double* seq);
```

that `SWIG` would not match the *typemap* signature given above with the argument list for `rms`. Fortunately, `numpy.i` has a set of *typemaps* with the data pointer given last:

```
%apply (int DIM1, double* IN_ARRAY1) {(int n, double* seq)};
```

## Using numpy.i

The `numpy.i` file is currently located in the `numpy/docs/swig` sub-directory under the `numpy` installation directory. Typically, you will want to copy it to the directory where you are developing your wrappers. If it is ever adopted by [SWIG](#) developers, then it will be installed in a standard place where [SWIG](#) can find it.

A simple module that only uses a single [SWIG](#) interface file should include the following:

```
%{
#define SWIG_FILE_WITH_INIT
%}
#include "numpy.i"
%init %{
import_array();
%}
```

Within a compiled [python](#) module, `import_array()` should only get called once. This could be in a C/C++ file that you have written and is linked to the module. If this is the case, then none of your interface files should `#define SWIG_FILE_WITH_INIT` or call `import_array()`. Or, this initialization call could be in a wrapper file generated by [SWIG](#) from an interface file that has the `%init` block as above. If this is the case, and you have more than one [SWIG](#) interface file, then only one interface file should `#define SWIG_FILE_WITH_INIT` and call `import_array()`.

## Available Typemaps

The typemap directives provided by `numpy.i` for arrays of different data types, say `double` and `int`, and dimensions of different types, say `int` or `long`, are identical to one another except for the C and [NumPy](#) type specifications. The typemaps are therefore implemented (typically behind the scenes) via a macro:

```
%numpy_typemaps(DATA_TYPE, DATA_TYPECODE, DIM_TYPE)
```

that can be invoked for appropriate `(DATA_TYPE, DATA_TYPECODE, DIM_TYPE)` triplets. For example:

```
%numpy_typemaps(double, NPY_DOUBLE, int)
%numpy_typemaps(int,    NPY_INT    , int)
```

The `numpy.i` interface file uses the `%numpy_typemaps` macro to implement typemaps for the following C data types and `int` dimension types:

- signed char
- unsigned char
- short
- unsigned short
- int
- unsigned int
- long
- unsigned long
- long long
- unsigned long long
- float
- double

In the following descriptions, we reference a generic `DATA_TYPE`, which could be any of the C data types listed above.

## Input Arrays

Input arrays are defined as arrays of data that are passed into a routine but are not altered in-place or returned to the user. The [python](#) input array is therefore allowed to be almost any [python](#) sequence (such as a list) that can be converted to the requested type of array. The input array signatures are

- (DATA\_TYPE IN\_ARRAY1[ANY])
- (DATA\_TYPE\* IN\_ARRAY1, int DIM1)
- (int DIM1, DATA\_TYPE\* IN\_ARRAY1)
- (DATA\_TYPE IN\_ARRAY2[ANY][ANY])
- (DATA\_TYPE\* IN\_ARRAY2, int DIM1, int DIM2)
- (int DIM1, int DIM2, DATA\_TYPE\* IN\_ARRAY2)

The first signature listed, (DATA\_TYPE IN\_ARRAY[ANY]) is for one-dimensional arrays with hard-coded dimensions. Likewise, (DATA\_TYPE IN\_ARRAY2[ANY][ANY]) is for two-dimensional arrays with hard-coded dimensions.

## In-Place Arrays

In-place arrays are defined as arrays that are modified in-place. The input values may or may not be used, but the values at the time the function returns are significant. The provided [python](#) argument must therefore be a [NumPy](#) array of the required type. The in-place signatures are

- (DATA\_TYPE INPLACE\_ARRAY1[ANY])
- (DATA\_TYPE\* INPLACE\_ARRAY1, int DIM1)
- (int DIM1, DATA\_TYPE\* INPLACE\_ARRAY1)
- (DATA\_TYPE INPLACE\_ARRAY2[ANY][ANY])
- (DATA\_TYPE\* INPLACE\_ARRAY2, int DIM1, int DIM2)
- (int DIM1, int DIM2, DATA\_TYPE\* INPLACE\_ARRAY2)

These typemaps now check to make sure that the INPLACE\_ARRAY arguments use native byte ordering. If not, an exception is raised.

## Argout Arrays

Argout arrays are arrays that appear in the input arguments in C, but are in fact output arrays. This pattern occurs often when there is more than one output variable and the single return argument is therefore not sufficient. In [python](#), the conventional way to return multiple arguments is to pack them into a sequence (tuple, list, etc.) and return the sequence. This is what the argout typemaps do. If a wrapped function that uses these argout typemaps has more than one return argument, they are packed into a tuple or list, depending on the version of [python](#). The [python](#) user does not pass these arrays in, they simply get returned. The argout signatures are

- (DATA\_TYPE ARGOUT\_ARRAY1[ANY])
- (DATA\_TYPE\* ARGOUT\_ARRAY1, int DIM1)
- (int DIM1, DATA\_TYPE\* ARGOUT\_ARRAY1)
- (DATA\_TYPE ARGOUT\_ARRAY2[ANY][ANY])

These are typically used in situations where in C/C++, you would allocate a(n) array(s) on the heap, and call the function to fill the array(s) values. In python, the arrays are allocated for you and returned as new array objects.

Note that we support DATA\_TYPE\* argout typemaps in 1D, but not 2D. This because of a quirk with the [SWIG](#) typemap syntax and cannot be avoided. Note that for these types of 1D typemaps, the python function will take a single argument representing DIM1.

## Output Arrays

The `numpy.i` interface file does not support typemaps for output arrays, for several reasons. First, C/C++ function return arguments do not have names, so signatures for `%typemap(out)` do not include names. This means that if `numpy.i` supported them, they would apply to all pointer return arguments for the supported numeric types. This seems too dangerous. Second, C/C++ return arguments are limited to a single value. This prevents obtaining dimension information in a general way. Third, arrays with hard-coded lengths are not permitted as return arguments. In other words:

```
double[3] newVector(double x, double y, double z);
```

is not legal C/C++ syntax. Therefore, we cannot provide typemaps of the form:

```
%typemap(out) (TYPE[ANY]);
```

If you run into a situation where a function or method is returning a pointer to an array, your best bet is to write your own version of the function to be wrapped, either with `%extend` for the case of class methods or `%ignore` and `%rename` for the case of functions.

## Other Common Types: bool

Note that C++ type `bool` is not supported in the list in the [Available Typemaps](#) section. NumPy bools are a single byte, while the C++ `bool` is four bytes (at least on my system). Therefore:

```
%numpy_typemaps(bool, NPY_BOOL, int)
```

will result in typemaps that will produce code that reference improper data lengths. You can implement the following macro expansion:

```
%numpy_typemaps(bool, NPY_UINT, int)
```

to fix the data length problem, and [Input Arrays](#) will work fine, but [In-Place Arrays](#) might fail type-checking.

## Other Common Types: complex

Typemap conversions for complex floating-point types is also not supported automatically. This is because [python](#) and [NumPy](#) are written in C, which does not have native complex types. Both [python](#) and [NumPy](#) implement their own (essentially equivalent) `struct` definitions for complex variables:

```
/* Python */
typedef struct {double real; double imag;} Py_complex;

/* NumPy */
typedef struct {float real, imag;} npy_cfloat;
typedef struct {double real, imag;} npy_cdouble;
```

We could have implemented:

```
%numpy_typemaps(Py_complex , NPY_DOUBLE , int)
%numpy_typemaps(npy_cfloat , NPY_CFLOAT , int)
%numpy_typemaps(npy_cdouble, NPY_CDOUBLE, int)
```

which would have provided automatic type conversions for arrays of type `Py_complex`, `npy_cfloat` and `npy_cdouble`. However, it seemed unlikely that there would be any independent (non-[python](#), non-[NumPy](#)) application code that people would be using [SWIG](#) to generate a python interface to, that also used these definitions for complex types. More likely, these application codes will define their own complex types, or in the case of C++, use `std::complex`. Assuming these data structures are compatible with [python](#) and [NumPy](#) complex types, `%numpy_typemap` expansions as above (with the user's complex type substituted for the first argument) should work.

## Helper Functions

The `numpy.i` file contains several macros and routines that it uses internally to build its typemaps. However, these functions may be useful elsewhere in your interface file.

### Macros

- is\_array(a)** Evaluates as true if **a** is non-NULL and can be cast to a `PyArrayObject*`.
- array\_type(a)** Evaluates to the integer data type code of **a**, assuming **a** can be cast to a `PyArrayObject*`.
- array\_numdims(a)** Evaluates to the integer number of dimensions of **a**, assuming **a** can be cast to a `PyArrayObject*`.
- array\_dimensions(a)** Evaluates to an array of type `numpy_intp` and length `array_numdims(a)`, giving the lengths of all of the dimensions of **a**, assuming **a** can be cast to a `PyArrayObject*`.
- array\_size(a,i)** Evaluates to the *i*-th dimension size of **a**, assuming **a** can be cast to a `PyArrayObject*`.
- array\_is\_contiguous(a)** Evaluates as true if **a** is a contiguous array. Equivalent to `(PyArray_ISCONTIGUOUS(a))`.
- array\_is\_native(a)** Evaluates as true if the data buffer of **a** uses native byte order. Equivalent to `(PyArray_ISNOTSWAPPED(a))`.

### Routines

- char\* pytype\_string(PyObject\* py\_obj)** Given a `PyObject*`, return a string describing its type.
- char\* typecode\_string(int typecode)** Given a [NumPy](#) integer typecode, return a string describing the type.
- int type\_match(int actual\_type, int desired\_type)** Make sure input has correct [NumPy](#) type. Allow character and byte to match. Also allow int and long to match. This is deprecated. You should use `PyArray_EquivTypenums()` instead.
- PyArrayObject\* obj\_to\_array\_no\_conversion(PyObject\* input, int typecode)** Given a `PyObject*`, cast it to a `PyArrayObject*` if legal. If not, set the python error string appropriately and return NULL.
- PyArrayObject\* obj\_to\_array\_allow\_conversion(PyObject\* input, int typecode, int\* is\_new\_object)** Convert the given `PyObject*` to a [NumPy](#) array with the given typecode. On Success, return a valid `PyArrayObject*` with the correct type. On failure, the python error string will be set and the routine returns NULL.
- PyArrayObject\* make\_contiguous(PyArrayObject\* ary, int\* is\_new\_object, int min\_dims, int max\_dims)** Given a `PyArrayObject*`, check to see if it is contiguous. If so, return the input pointer and flag it as not a new object. If it is not contiguous, create a new `PyArrayObject*` using the original data, flag it as a new object and return the pointer.
- PyArrayObject\* obj\_to\_array\_contiguous\_allow\_conversion(PyObject\* input, int typecode, int\* is\_new\_object)** Convert a given `PyObject*` to a contiguous `PyArrayObject*` of the specified type. If the input object is not a contiguous `PyArrayObject*`, a new one will be created and the new object flag will be set.
- int require\_contiguous(PyArrayObject\* ary)** Test whether a `PyArrayObject*` is contiguous. If array is contiguous, return 1. Otherwise, set the python error string and return 0.

**int require\_native(PyArray\_Object\* ary)** Require that a numpy array is not byte-swapped. If the array is not byte-swapped, return 1. Otherwise, set the python error string and return 0.

**int require\_dimensions(PyArrayObject\* ary, int exact\_dimensions)** Require the given PyArrayObject\* to have a specified number of dimensions. If the array has the specified number of dimensions, return 1. Otherwise, set the python error string and return 0.

**int require\_dimensions\_n(PyArrayObject\* ary, int\* exact\_dimensions, int n)** Require the given PyArrayObject\* to have one of a list of specified number of dimensions. If the array has one of the specified number of dimensions, return 1. Otherwise, set the python error string and return 0.

**int require\_size(PyArrayObject\* ary, int\* size, int n)** Require the given PyArrayObject\* to have a specified shape. If the array has the specified shape, return 1. Otherwise, set the python error string and return 0.

## Beyond the Provided Typemaps

There are many C or C++ array/NumPy array situations not covered by a simple `%include "numpy.i"` and subsequent `%apply` directives.

### A Common Example

Consider a reasonable prototype for a dot product function:

```
double dot(int len, double* vec1, double* vec2);
```

The python interface that we want is:

```
def dot(vec1, vec2):
```

The problem here is that there is one dimension argument and two array arguments, and our typemaps are set up for dimensions that apply to a single array (in fact, [SWIG](#) does not provide a mechanism for associating `len` with `vec2` that takes two python input arguments). The recommended solution is the following:

```
%apply (int DIM1, double* IN_ARRAY1) {(int len1, double* vec1),
                                         (int len2, double* vec2)}
%rename (dot) my_dot;
%inline %{
double my_dot(int len1, double* vec1, int len2, double* vec2) {
    if (len1 != len2) {
        PyErr_Format(PyExc_ValueError,
                     "Arrays of lengths (%d,%d) given",
                     len1, len2);
        return 0.0;
    }
    return dot(len1, vec1, vec2);
}
%}
```

If the header file that contains the prototype for `dot()` also contains other prototypes that you want to wrap, so that you need to `%include` this header file, then you will also need a `%ignore dot;` directive, placed after the `%rename` and before the `%include` directives.

## Other Situations

There are other wrapping situations in which `numpy.i` may be helpful when you encounter them.

- In some situations, it is possible that you could use the `%numpy_templates` macro to implement typemaps for your own types. See the [Other Common Types: bool](#) or [Other Common Types: complex](#) sections for examples. Another situation is if your dimensions are of a type other than `int` (say `long` for example):

```
%numpy_typemaps(double, NPY_DOUBLE, long)
```

- You can use the code in `numpy.i` to write your own typemaps. For example, if you had a three-dimensional array as a function argument, you could cut-and-paste the appropriate two-dimensional typemap into your interface file. The modifications for the third dimension would be trivial.
- Sometimes, the best approach is to use the `%extend` directive to define new methods for your classes (or overload existing ones) that take a `PyObject*` (that either is or can be converted to a `PyArrayObject*`) instead of a pointer to a buffer. In this case, the helper routines in `numpy.i` can be very useful.
- Writing typemaps can be a bit nonintuitive. If you have specific questions about writing [SWIG](#) typemaps for [NumPy](#), the developers of `numpy.i` do monitor the [Numpy-discussion](#) and [Swig-user](#) mail lists.

## A Final Note

When you use the `%apply` directive, as is usually necessary to use `numpy.i`, it will remain in effect until you tell [SWIG](#) that it shouldn't be. If the arguments to the functions or methods that you are wrapping have common names, such as `length` or `vector`, these typemaps may get applied in situations you do not expect or want. Therefore, it is always a good idea to add a `%clear` directive after you are done with a specific typemap:

```
%apply (double* IN_ARRAY1, int DIM1) {(double* vector, int length)}  
%include "my_header.h"  
%clear (double* vector, int length);
```

In general, you should target these typemap signatures specifically where you want them, and then clear them after you are done.

## Acknowledgements

Many people have worked to glue [SWIG](#) and [NumPy](#) together (as well as [SWIG](#) and the predecessors of [NumPy](#), [Numeric](#) and [numarray](#)). The effort to standardize this work into `numpy.i` began at the 2005 [SciPy](#) Conference with a conversation between Fernando Perez and myself. Fernando collected helper functions and typemaps from Michael Hunter, Anna Omelchenko and Michael Sanner. Sebastian Hasse has also provided additional error checking and use cases. The work of these contributors has made this end result possible.

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