Eratosthenes' sieve Eric Martin, CSE, UNSW

COMP9021 Principles of Programming

```
[1]: from math import sqrt from itertools import chain from timeit import timeit
```

Let n be a natural number. If a natural number m at most equal to n is not prime then m is of the form $p_1 \times \cdots \times p_k$ for some $k \geq 2$ and prime numbers $p_1, ..., p_k$ with $p_1 \leq \cdots \leq p_k$; hence $n \geq m \geq p_1^2$, hence $p_1 \leq \sqrt{n}$. This implies that all natural numbers at most equal to n that are not prime have a proper factor at most equal to $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$. So to identify all prime numbers up to and possibly including n, it suffices to cross out, from the collection of all numbers between 2 and n, all proper multiples at most equal to n of 2, 3, ... up to and including $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$. Moreover, given a number p at most equal to $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$, if all proper multiples at most equal to n of all numbers greater than 1 and smaller than p have been crossed out, then either p has been crossed out (together with all its multiples at most equal to n, case in which p is not prime), or only its proper multiples at least equal to p^2 and at most equal to n remain to be crossed out (case in which p is prime).

There is a risk that the computation of $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$ yields a smaller number. The risk seems particularly high in case n is the perfect square of a prime: if the computation of $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$ yielded a smaller number, then n would not be crossed out and be incorrectly part of the collection of integers eventually declared to be prime.

To appreciate the imprecision of floating point computation, let us witness computations of $(\sqrt{n})^2$ that are too small, correct (as a floating point number), or too large:

```
[2]: too_small = []
    just_right = []
    too_large = []

n = 1
while len(too_small) < 10 or len(just_right) < 10 or len(too_large) < 10:
    sqrt_n = sqrt(n)
    if sqrt_n ** 2 < n and len(too_small) < 10:
        too_small.append((n, sqrt_n, sqrt_n ** 2))
    elif sqrt_n ** 2 == n and len(just_right) < 10:
        just_right.append((n, sqrt_n, sqrt_n ** 2))
    elif sqrt_n ** 2 > n and len(too_large) < 10:
        too_large.append((n, sqrt_n, sqrt_n ** 2))
    n += 1

print('Too small!')</pre>
```

```
for triple in too_small:
    print(triple)
print('\nJust right!')
for triple in just_right:
    print(triple)
print('\nToo large!')
for triple in too_large:
    print(triple)
Too small!
(3, 1.7320508075688772, 2.99999999999999)
(6, 2.449489742783178, 5.99999999999999)
(12, 3.4641016151377544, 11.99999999999999)
(13, 3.605551275463989, 12.99999999999998)
(18, 4.242640687119285, 17.9999999999999)
(23, 4.795831523312719, 22.99999999999996)
(24, 4.898979485566356, 23.9999999999999)
(26, 5.0990195135927845, 25.9999999999999)
(29, 5.385164807134504, 28.9999999999999)
(31, 5.5677643628300215, 30.9999999999999)
Just right!
(1, 1.0, 1.0)
(4, 2.0, 4.0)
(9, 3.0, 9.0)
(11, 3.3166247903554, 11.0)
(14, 3.7416573867739413, 14.0)
(16, 4.0, 16.0)
(17, 4.123105625617661, 17.0)
(21, 4.58257569495584, 21.0)
(22, 4.69041575982343, 22.0)
(25, 5.0, 25.0)
Too large!
(2, 1.4142135623730951, 2.00000000000000004)
(5, 2.23606797749979, 5.000000000000001)
(7, 2.6457513110645907, 7.0000000000000001)
(8, 2.8284271247461903, 8.000000000000000)
(10, 3.1622776601683795, 10.000000000000000)
(15, 3.872983346207417, 15.000000000000000)
(19, 4.358898943540674, 19.0000000000000004)
(20, 4.47213595499958, 20.0000000000000004)
(28, 5.291502622129181, 28.0000000000000004)
(32, 5.656854249492381, 32.00000000000001)
```

The square roots of the perfect squares that have been considered in the previous code fragment have all been computed correctly (as floating point numbers). Also observe that they have been squared correctly (as floating point numbers), but for large enough perfect squares, that does not

hold any more:

```
[3]: too_small = None
    too_large = None

i = 1
while too_small is None or too_large is None:
    i_square = i ** 2
    if sqrt(i_square) ** 2 < i_square:
        too_small = i, i_square, sqrt(i_square), sqrt(i_square) ** 2
    elif sqrt(i_square) ** 2 > i_square:
        too_large = i, i_square, sqrt(i_square), sqrt(i_square) ** 2
    i += 1

print('Too small!')
print(too_small)
print('\nToo large!')
print(too_large)
```

```
Too small!
(94906299, 9007205589877401, 94906299.0, 9007205589877400.0)

Too large!
(94906301, 9007205969502601, 94906301.0, 9007205969502602.0)
```

The previous code fragment leaves open the possibility that the computation of the square root of a perfect square is always correct (as a floating point number), and in particular, is never smaller than $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$. It is also possible that when n is not a perfect square, then the computation of \sqrt{n} , though often incorrect, and in particular often smaller than \sqrt{n} , is still never smaller than $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$. So whether n is a perfect square or not, changing the type of the computation of \sqrt{n} from floating point to integer might result in a correct computation of $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$. Still, to be on the safe side, it is preferable to use round() rather than int().

Compare:

```
[4]: int(3.01), round(3.01) int(2.99), round(2.99)
```

[4]: (3, 3)

[4]:(2, 3)

A natural question in relation to round() is: for a given integer k, what is k + 0.5 rounded to? It turns out to be the one of k and k + 1 which is closest to 0:

```
[5]: round(2.5), round(-2.5)
```

[5]: (2, -2)

round() also lets us specify a precision:

```
[6]: round(1.9876543, 0)
round(1.9876543, 1)
round(1.9876543, 2)
round(1.9876543, 3)
round(1.9876543, 10)
```

[6]: 2.0

[6]: 2.0

[6]: 1.99

[6]: 1.988

[6]: 1.9876543

A list sieve of length n+1 can be used to record whether i is prime for $2 \le i \le n$, storing True or False at index i depending on whether i is believed to be prime or not. The first two elements of sieve, of index 0 and 1, are unused. To start with, we assume that all numbers are prime.

For illustration purposes, let us fix n to some value, make it the value of a variable n, and define sieve accordingly:

```
[7]: n = 37
sieve = [True] * (n + 1)
```

To nicely display sieve's contents and indexes at various stages of the procedure, we know that we can make use of formatted strings and in particular, output decimal numbers within a particular field width, if necessary padding with spaces (the default) or with 0's; the decimal number and the field width can be the values of variables that both occur within a pair of curly braces within a formatted string:

```
[8]: x = 100; w = 5

f'|{x:{w}}|'
f'|{x:0{w}}|'
```

[8]: '| 100|'

[8]: '|00100|'

For now we fix the field width to 3 but below, to appropriately deal with a sieve of arbitrary size, we will compute the field width and make it a function of the largest prime to display.

```
[9]: def print_sieve_contents_and_indexes():
    for e in sieve:
        print(' T', end='') if e else print(' F', end='')
    print()
    for i in range(len(sieve)):
```

```
print(f'{i:3}', end='')
print_sieve_contents_and_indexes()
```

To cross out all multiples at most equal to n of a prime number p, starting with p^2 if the multiples at most equal to n of all smaller primes have been crossed out already, we need to generate a sequence of the form p^2 , $p^2 + p$, $p^2 + 2p$... This is easily done with range():

```
[10]: # One argument, the ending point, which is excluded.
    # The starting point is O, the default,
    # The step is 1, the default
    list(range(4))
    # Two arguments, the starting point, which is included,
    # and the ending point, which is excluded.
    # The step is 1, the default
    list(range(4, 10))
    # Three arguments, the starting point, which is included,
    # the ending point, which is excluded, and the step.
    list(range(3, 11, 2))
    list(range(3, 11, 3))
    list(range(11, 3, -2))
    list(range(11, 3, -3))
```

[10]: [0, 1, 2, 3]

[10]: [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]

[10]: [3, 5, 7, 9]

[10]: [3, 6, 9]

[10]: [11, 9, 7, 5]

[10]: [11, 8, 5]

To observe how, with n set to 37, proper multiples of 2, 3 and 5 are crossed out while 4 and 6 are found out to be crossed out (together with their multiples) already, we successively call the following function with p set to 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (note that $6 = |\sqrt{37}|$) as argument:

```
[11]: def cross_out_proper_multiples(p):
    # We assume that this function will be called in the order
    # eliminate_proper_multiples(2)
    # eliminate_proper_multiples(3)
```

[12]: cross_out_proper_multiples(2)

```
2 is not a multiple of a smaller number, hence it is prime.
Now crossing out all proper multiples of 2 at most equal to 37.
Crossing out 4
Crossing out 6
Crossing out 8
Crossing out 10
Crossing out 12
Crossing out 14
Crossing out 16
Crossing out 18
Crossing out 20
Crossing out 22
Crossing out 24
Crossing out 26
Crossing out 28
Crossing out 30
Crossing out 32
Crossing out 34
Crossing out 36
 TTTTFFF
                    T F T F T F T F T F T F T F T F T
FTFTFTFTF
                       ТЕ
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37
```

```
[13]: cross_out_proper_multiples(3)
```

3 is not a multiple of a smaller number, hence it is prime.

```
Now crossing out all proper multiples of 3 at most equal to 37.
      Crossing out 9
      Crossing out 12
      Crossing out 15
     Crossing out 18
      Crossing out 21
     Crossing out 24
     Crossing out 27
     Crossing out 30
      Crossing out 33
     Crossing out 36
      TTTTFTFFFFFFFFFFFFF
     F F F T F T F F T
      0 \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 6 \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \ 10 \ 11 \ 12 \ 13 \ 14 \ 15 \ 16 \ 17 \ 18 \ 19 \ 20 \ 21 \ 22 \ 23 \ 24 \ 25
     26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37
[14]: cross_out_proper_multiples(4)
     4 has been crossed out as a multiple of a smaller number.
[15]: cross_out_proper_multiples(5)
     5 is not a multiple of a smaller number, hence it is prime.
     Now crossing out all proper multiples of 5 at most equal to 37.
     Crossing out 25
     Crossing out 30
     Crossing out 35
      FFFTFFFFFF
      0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
     26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37
[16]: cross_out_proper_multiples(6)
     6 has been crossed out as a multiple of a smaller number.
[17]: print(f'The prime numbers at most equal to {n} are:')
     for p in range(2, n + 1):
         if sieve[p]:
             print(f'{p:4}', end='')
     The prime numbers at most equal to 37 are:
                   7 11 13 17 19 23 29 31 37
     Putting it all together:
[18]: def sieve_of_primes_up_to(n):
         primes_sieve = [True] * (n + 1)
         for p in range(2, round(sqrt(n)) + 1):
```

```
if primes_sieve[p]:
    for i in range(p * p, n + 1, p):
        primes_sieve[i] = False
return primes_sieve
```

To display all prime numbers at most equal to n, we define two functions. One sequence and max size from(), is designed to, from the list returned by sieve_of_primes_up_to(), determine and return the corresponding sequence of primes σ together with the number of digits l in the last (and largest) prime in the sequence; σ and l will be assigned to both arguments, sequence and max_size, respectively, of the other function, nicely_display(). We will utilise this function again when we implement other sieve methods. It is general enough to nicely display any sequence of data all of which are output with at most max_size many characters. More precisely, nicely display() has the following features. It outputs at most 80 characters per line. Two spaces precede the display of the data that are output with max_size many characters. Three spaces precede the display of the data that are output with max_size minus 1 many characters, if any. Four spaces precede the display of the data that are output with max_size minus 2 many digits, if any... That way, all data will be nicely aligned column by column, with the guarantee that at least two spaces will separate two consecutive data on the same line. If l is the value of max_size, then exactly $\lfloor \frac{80}{l+2} \rfloor$ data will be displayed per line, with the possible exception of the last line:

```
[19]: def nicely_display(sequence, max_size):
    field_width = max_size + 2
    nb_of_fields = 80 // field_width
    count = 0
    for e in sequence:
        print(f'{e:{field_width}}', end='')
        count += 1
        if count % nb_of_fields == 0:
            print()

nicely_display(range(200), 3)
```

```
5
                                             7
                                                          9
  0
        1
              2
                     3
                           4
                                       6
                                                    8
                                                               10
                                                                     11
                                                                           12
                                                                                  13
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 16
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192
      193
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                                     198
                                           199
```

To determine the value of max_size when using nicely_display() to display all prime numbers

up to a largest prime number p, we need to determine the number of digits in p, which is easily done by letting str() produce a string from an integer, and calling len() on the former:

```
[20]: str(991) len(str('991'))
```

[20]: '991'

[20]: 3

In nicely_display(), a for statement processes its first argument, sequence. So sequence has to be an iterable, and possibly an iterator. The next() method can be applied to an iterator. From an iterable that is not an iterator, one can get an iterator thanks to the iter() function. The iter() function can be applied to any iterable, so also to an iterator, in which case it just returns its argument:

```
[21]: | # An iterable (an object of the range class) that is not an iterator
      x = range(2)
      x is iter(x)
      y = iter(x)
      next(y)
      next(y)
      # An iterable (a list) that is not an iterator
      x = [10, 11]
      x is iter(x)
      y = iter(x)
      next(y)
      next(y)
      # An iterable (a generator expression) that is an iterator
      x = (u \text{ for } u \text{ in } (100, 200))
      x is iter(x)
      next(x)
      next(x)
```

[21]: False

[21]: 0

[21]: 1

[21]: False

[21]: 10

[21]: 11

[21]: True

[21]: 100

[21]: 200

When a for statement processes an iterator, it calls next() again and again, until a StopIteration is generated, causing it to gracefully stop execution. When a for statement processes an iterable that is not an iterator, it first gets an iterator from the iterable thanks to iter(), iterator which is then processed as described. So the argument sequence of nicely_display() can be either an iterable that is not an iterator, like a list, or a tuple; or it can be an iterator, like a generator expression. The second option can lead to more effective code than the first one. Indeed, when a for statement processes a list or tuple, then that list or tuple had to be created in the first place, which the for statement then processes by implicit calls to next() on an iterator produced from that list or tuple by iter(). On the other hand, when a for statement processes a generator expression, then only a mechanism to produce a sequence had to be created in the first place, and that mechanism is activated (next() is implicitly called again and again) to generate all elements in the sequence and process them "on the fly":

```
[22]: sieve = [True, True, True, False, True, False, True, False]
      # A list created from sieve thanks to a list comprehension.
      # sieve has been scanned from beginning to end to create primes.
      primes = [i for i in range(2, len(sieve)) if sieve[i]]
      primes
      # An iterator is created from primes, to generate all members of primes
      # and print them out.
      # So eventually, two sequences will have been processed.
      for e in primes:
          print(e, end=' ')
      sieve = [True, True, True, True, False, True, False, True, False]
      # A generator expression defined from sieve.
      # sieve has not been scanned from beginning to end to create primes;
      # primes is a mechanism to generate some numbers from sieve.
      primes = (i for i in range(2, len(sieve)) if sieve[i])
      primes
      # The mechanism is activated as the for loop is executed.
      # As an effect, sieve is scanned from beginning to end,
      # numbers are generated and printed out on the fly.
      # So eventually, only one sequence will have been processed.
      for e in primes:
          print(e, end=' ')
```

[22]: [2, 3, 5, 7]

2 3 5 7

[22]: <generator object <genexpr> at 0x10dab9970>

2 3 5 7

Based on these considerations, we define sequence_and_max_size_from() as follows:

```
[23]: def sequence_and_max_size_from(sieve):
    largest_prime = len(sieve) - 1
    while not sieve[largest_prime]:
        largest_prime -= 1
    return (p for p in range(2, len(sieve)) if sieve[p]),\
        len(str(largest_prime))
```

We now have everything we need to nicely display all prime numbers at most equal to n:

```
[24]: nicely_display(*sequence_and_max_size_from(sieve_of_primes_up_to(1_000)))
```

```
2
        3
              5
                    7
                         11
                               13
                                     17
                                           19
                                                 23
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947
      953
           967
                  971
                                    991
                                          997
                        977
                              983
```

To save half of the sieve's space and not have to cross out the proper multiples of 2, one can change sieve and make it a list of length $\lfloor \frac{n+1}{2} \rfloor$, with indexes 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... meant to refer to the numbers 2, 3, 5, 7, 9... The price we pay for this is that we lose the simple equivalence between "number p is prime" and "sieve eventually stores True at index p": the equivalence becomes: "number p is prime" iff:

- p = 2 or p is odd, and
- sieve eventually stores True at index $\lfloor \frac{p-1}{2} \rfloor$).

Let p be a number between 3 and $\lfloor \sqrt{n} \rfloor$. The index that refers to p in this modified sieve is $k = \frac{p-1}{2}$, hence the index that refers to p^2 is $\frac{p^2-1}{2} = \frac{(p-1)(p+1)}{2} = \frac{p-1}{2}2(\frac{p-1}{2}+1) = 2k(k+1)$. Also, only the proper odd multiples at most equal to p have to be crossed out; so after having crossed out such a multiple p, the next multiple of p that needs to crossed out (in case it is still at most equal to p), is referred to at index $\frac{a+2p-1}{2} = \frac{a-1}{2} + p = \frac{a-1}{2} + 2k + 1$, so p0 and p1 needs to be added to the index that refers to p2 to refer to that next multiple of p2.

Putting it all together:

```
[25]: def optimised_sieve_of_primes_up_to(n):
    n_index = (n - 1) // 2
    sieve = [True] * (n_index + 1)
    for k in range(1, (round(sqrt(n)) + 1) // 2):
        if sieve[k]:
```

To all prime numbers at most equal to nfrom $_{
m the}$ list returned optimised_sieve_of_primes_up_to(), we need to adapt the function sequence_and_max_size_from(). Essentially, one has to generate all numbers of the form 2i + 1for all $1 \le i \le \lfloor \frac{n-1}{2} \rfloor$ such that the list sieve returned by optimised_sieve_of_primes_up_to() has a value of True at index i; such is the relationship between the odd prime numbers at most equal to n and the strictly positive indexes in sieve. But these odd prime numbers have to be preceded with 2. We still want to return an iterator. The simplest solution is to create an iterator from an iterator meant to generate 2 only, and the generator expression (2 * p + 1 for p in range(1, len(sieve)) if sieve[p])). The chain() function from the itertools module lets us combine a sequence of iterables (some of which can be iterators) into one iterator:

```
[26]: # Providing as argument to list() an iterator created from two iterators list(chain(iter(range(2)), (i for i in [10, 20, 30])))
# Providing as argument to list() an iterator created from one iterator # and one iterable that is not an iterator list(chain(range(2), (i for i in [10, 20, 30])))
# Providing as argument to list() an iterator created from two iterables # that are not iterators list(chain(range(2), [10, 20, 30]))
```

[26]: [0, 1, 10, 20, 30]

[26]: [0, 1, 10, 20, 30]

[26]: [0, 1, 10, 20, 30]

Based on these considerations, we nicely display all prime numbers identified by optimised_sieve_of_primes_up_to() as follows:

```
227
     229
          233
                239
                      241
                           251
                                 257
                                      263
                                            269
                                                 271
                                                       277
                                                            281
                                                                  283
                                                                       293
                                                                             307
                                                                                   311
313
     317
          331
                337
                      347
                           349
                                 353
                                      359
                                            367
                                                 373
                                                       379
                                                            383
                                                                  389
                                                                       397
                                                                             401
                                                                                   409
     421
                433
419
          431
                      439
                           443
                                 449
                                      457
                                            461
                                                 463
                                                       467
                                                            479
                                                                  487
                                                                       491
                                                                             499
                                                                                   503
509
     521
          523
                541
                      547
                           557
                                 563
                                      569
                                            571
                                                 577
                                                       587
                                                            593
                                                                  599
                                                                       601
                                                                             607
                                                                                   613
     619
          631
                641
                      643
                           647
                                 653
                                      659
                                            661
                                                 673
                                                       677
                                                            683
                                                                  691
                                                                       701
                                                                             709
                                                                                   719
617
727
     733
          739
                743
                      751
                           757
                                 761
                                      769
                                            773
                                                 787
                                                       797
                                                            809
                                                                  811
                                                                       821
                                                                             823
                                                                                   827
829
     839
          853
                857
                      859
                           863
                                 877
                                      881
                                            883
                                                 887
                                                       907
                                                            911
                                                                  919
                                                                       929
                                                                             937
                                                                                   941
                                 991
947
     953
          967
                971
                     977
                           983
                                      997
```

Let us get an idea of how large we can afford n to be and how more efficient optimised_sieve_of_primes_up_to() is compared to sieve_of_primes_up_to(). We ask the timeit() method from the timeit module to executing once (number=1) the code sieve_of_primes_up_to(10_000_000), the assignment of the value returned by globals() to globals being needed to let timetit() know about the names sieve_of_primes_up_to and optimised_sieve_of_primes_up_to:

[29]: 1.4917003529999988

[29]: 0.6268495150000035