# Lecture #17: Abstraction Support: Exceptions, Operators, Properties

# Failed preconditions

- Part of the contract between the implementor and client is the set of *preconditions* under which a function, method, etc. is supposed to operate.

- Example:

```
class Rational:
    def __init__(self, x, y):
        """"The rational number x/y.  Assumes that x and y
        are ints and  y != 0."""
```

- Here, "x and y are ints and y!=0" is a precondition on the client.

- So what happens when the precondition is not met?

# Programmer Errors

- Python has preconditions of its own.

- E.g., type rules on operations: `3 + (2, 1)` is invalid.

- What happens when we (programmers) violate these preconditions?

# Outside Events

- Some operations may entail the possibility of errors caused by the data or the environment in which a program runs.

- I/O over a network is a common example: connections go down; data is corrupted.

- User input is another major source of error: we may ask to read an integer numeral, and be handed something non-numeric.

- Again, what happens when such errors occur?

# Possible Repsonses

- One approach is to take the point of view that when a precondition is violated, all bets are off and the implementor is free to do anything.

  – Corresponds to a logical axiom: False $\Rightarrow$ True.

  – But not a particularly helpful or safe approach.

- One can adopt a convention in which erroneous operations return special error values.

  – Feasible in Python, but less so in languages that require specific types on return values.

  – Used in the C library, but can't be used for non-integer-returning functions.

  – Error prone (too easy to ignore errors).

  – Cluttered (reader is forced to wade through a lot of error-handling code, a distraction from the main algorithm).

- Numerous programming languages, including Python, support a general notion of *exceptional condition* or *exception* with supporting syntax and semantics that separate error handling from main program logic.

# Exceptions

- An *exception mechanism* is a control structure that

  – Halts execution at one point in a program (called *raising* or *throwing* an exception).

  – Resumes execution at some other, previously designated point in the program (called *catching* or *handling* an exception).

- In Python, the raise statement throws exceptions, and try statements catch them:

```
def f0(...):
    try:
        g0(...)         # 1.  Call of g...
        OTHER STUFF     # Skipped
    except:
        handle oops     # 3.  Handle problem
...
def g1(...): # Eventually called by g0, possibly many calls down
    if detectError():
        raise Oops      # 2.  Raise exception
    MORE                # Skipped
```

# Communicating the Reason

- Normally, the handler would like to know the reason for an exception.

- "Reason," being a noun, suggests we use objects, which is what Python does.

- Python defines the class BaseException. It or any subclass of it may convey information to a handler. We'll call these *exception classes.*

- BaseClassException carries arbitrary information as if declared:

```python
class BaseException:
    def __init__(self, *args):
        self.args = args
    ...
```

- The raise statement then packages up and sends information to a handler:

```python
raise ValueError("x must be positive", x, y)
raise ValueError      # Short for raise ValueError()
e = ValueError("exceptions are just objects!")
raise e               # So this works, too
```

# Handlers

- A function indicates that something is wrong; it is the client (caller) that decides what to do about it.

- The try statement allows one to provide one or more handlers for a set of statements, with selection based on the type of exception object thrown.

```
try:
    assorted statements
except ValueError:
    print("Something was wrong with the arguments")
except EnvironmentError:  # Also catches subtypes IOError, OSError
    print("The operating system is telling us something")
except:                         # Some other exception
    print("Something wrong")
```

# Retrieving the Exception

- So far, we've just looked at exception *types.*

- To get at the exception objects, use a bit more syntax:

```
try:
        assorted statements
except ValueError as exc:
        print("Something was wrong with the arguments: {0}", exc)
```

# Cleaning Up and Reraising

- Sometimes we catch an exception in order to clean things up before the real handler takes over.

```
inp = open(aFile)
try:
    Assorted processing
    inp.close()
except:
    inp.close()
    raise            # Reraise the same exception
```

# Finally Clauses

- More generally, we can clean things up regardless of how we leave the try statement:

```
for i in range(100)
    try:
        setTimer(10)  # Set time limit
        if found(i):
            break
        longComputationThatMightTimeOut()
    finally:
        cancelTimer()
        # Continue with 'break' or with exception
```

- This fragment will always cancel the timer, whether the loop ends because of break or a timeout exception.

- After which, it carries on whatever caused the try to stop.

# Standard Exceptions

- See the Python library for a complete rundown.

- We'll often encounter ValueError (inappropriate values), AttributeError (x.foo, where there is no foo in x), TypeError, OSError (bad system call), IOError (such as nonexistent files).

- Other exceptions are not errors, but are used because raise is a convenient way to achieve some effect:

  - StopIteration: see last lecture.

  - SystemExit: Results from sys.exit($n$), which is intended to end a program.

# Example: Implementing Iterators

- An *iterator* is an abstraction device for hiding the representation of a collection of values.

- The **for** statement is actually a generic control construct with the following meaning (well, Python adds a few more bells and whistles):

```
for x in C:        MEANS        tmp_iter = C.__iter__()
    S                           try:
                                    while True:
                                        x = tmp_iter.__next__()
                                        S
                                except StopIteration:
                                    pass
```

- The `__next__` method can use the raise StopIteration statement to cause the loop to exit.

- Types that implement `__iter__` are called *iterable*, and those that implement `__next__` are *iterators*.

- The builtin functions iter(x) and next(x) are defined to call `x.__iter__()` and `x.__next__()`.

# Problem: Reconstruct the range class

- Want Range(1, 10) to give us something that behaves like a Python range, so that this loop prints 1–9:

```
for x in Range(1, 10):
    print(x)


class Range:
```

# Problem: Reconstruct the range class

- Want Range(1, 10) to give us something that behaves like a Python range, so that this loop prints 1–9:

```
for x in Range(1, 10):
    print(x)

class Range:
    def __init__(self, low, high):


    def __iter__(self):
```

# Problem: Reconstruct the range class

- Want Range(1, 10) to give us something that behaves like a Python range, so that this loop prints 1–9:

```
for x in Range(1, 10):
    print(x)
```

```
class Range:                              class RangeIter:
    def __init__(self, low, high):
        self._low = low
        self._high = high
    def __iter__(self):
        return RangeIter(self)
```

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```
for x in Range(1, 10):
    print(x)
```

```
class Range:                              class RangeIter:
    def __init__(self, low, high):            def __init__(self, limits):
        self._low = low
        self._high = high
    def __iter__(self):
        return RangeIter(self)                def __next__(self):
```

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for x in Range(1, 10):
    print(x)
```

```
class Range:                              class RangeIter:
    def __init__(self, low, high):            def __init__(self, limits):
        self._low = low                           self._bound = limits._high
        self._high = high                         self._next = limits._low
    def __iter__(self):
        return RangeIter(self)                def __next__(self):
```

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for x in Range(1, 10):
    print(x)
```

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class Range:                            class RangeIter:
    def __init__(self, low, high):          def __init__(self, limits):
        self._low = low                         self._bound = limits._high
        self._high = high                       self._next = limits._low
    def __iter__(self):
        return RangeIter(self)               def __next__(self):
                                                 if self._next >= self._bound:
                                                     raise StopIteration
                                                 else:
                                                     self._next += 1
                                                     return self._next-1
```

# Problem: Reconstruct the range class

- Want Range(1, 10) to give us something that behaves like a Python range, so that this loop prints 1–9:

```
for x in Range(1, 10):
    print(x)
```

```
class Range:                          class RangeIter:
    def __init__(self, low, high):        def __init__(self, limits):
        self._low = low                       self._bound = limits._high
        self._high = high                     self._next = limits._low
    def __iter__(self):
        return RangeIter(self)            def __next__(self):
                                             if self._next >= self._bound:
                                                 raise StopIteration
                                             else:
                                                 self._next += 1
                                             return self._next-1
```

# Summary

- Exceptions are a way of returning information from a function "out of band," and allowing programmers to clearly separate error handling from normal cases.

- In effect, specifying possible exceptions is therefore part of the interface.

- Usually, the specification is implicit: one assumes that violation of a precondition might cause an exception.

- When a particular exception indicates something that might normally arise (e.g., bad user input), it will often be mentioned explicitly in the documentation of a function.

- Finally, raise and try may be used purely as normal control structures. By convention, the exceptions used in this case don't end in "Error."

# Back To Rationals

- Before, we implemented rational numbers as functions. The "standard" way is to use a class.

- There are a few interesting problems along the way, at least if you want to make something that meets our natural expectations.

- Python has defined a whole bunch of library classes to capture different kinds of number (see numbers and fractions), but we're going to build our own here.

# Some Basics

- We'd like rational numbers, with the usual arithmetic.

- Furthermore, we'd like to integrate rationals with other numeric types, especially int and float.

- So, let's start with the constructor:

```python
class rational:
    def __init__(self, numer=0, denom=1):
        if type(numer) is not int or type(denom) is not int:
            raise TypeError("numerator or denominator not int")
        if denom == 0:
            raise ZeroDivisionError("denominator is 0")
        d = gcd(numer,denom)
        self.__numer, self.__denom = numer // d, denom // d
```

# Arithmetic

- Would be nice to use normal syntax, such as a+b for rationals.

- But we know how to do that from early lectures:

```
def __add__(self, y):
    return rational(self.__numer * y.__denom + self.__denom * y.__numer,
                    self.__denom * y.__denom)
```

- What do we do if y is an int?

- One solution: *Coercion*:

```
def __add__(self, y):
    y = rational._coerceToRational(y)
    return rational(self.__numer * y.__denom + self.__denom * y.__numer,
                    self.__denom * y.__denom)
```

# Coercion

- In programming languages, *coercion* refers to conversions between types or representations that preserve abstract values.

```
@staticmethod    # Why is this appropriate?
def _coerceToRational(y):
    if type(y) is rational:
        return y
    else:
        return ?
```

# Type Dispatching

- But now what about 3 + rational(1,2)? Ints don't know about rationals.

- This is a general problem with object-oriented languages. I call it "worship of the first parameter." It's the type of the first parameter (or that left of the dot) that controls what method gets called.

- Others use the phrase "the expression problem," because it arises in the context of arithmetic-expression-like things.

- There are various ways that languages have dealt with this.

- The brute-force solution is to introduce *multimethods* as a language feature (functions chosen on the basic of all parameters' types.)

- Or one can build something like this explicitly:

```
_add_dispatch_table = { (rational, int): _addri,
                        (int, rational): _addir, ...}
    def __add__(self, y):
        _add_dispatch_table[(type(self), type(y))](self, y)
```

# A Python Approach

- The dispatch-table requires a lot of cooperation among types.

- Python uses a different approach that allows extensibility without having to change existing numeric types.

- The expression x+y first tries x.__add__(y).

- If that throws the exception NotImplementedError, it next tries y.__radd__(x).

- The __add__ functions for standard numeric types observe this, and throw NotImplementedError if they can't handle their right operands.

- So, in rational:

```
def __radd__(self, y):
    return rational._coerceToRational(y).__add__(x)
```

- And now:

```
>>> 3 + rational(1,2)
7/2
```

# Syntax for Accessors

- Our previous implementation of rational numbers had functions for accessing the numerator and denominator, which now might look like this:

  ```
  def numer(self):
      """My numerator in lowest terms."""
      return self.__numer

  def denom(self):
      """My denominator in lowest terms."""
      return self.__denom
  ```

- It would be more convenient to be able to write simply x.numer and x.denom, but so far, the only way we know to allow this has problems:

  – The attributes are assignable, which we don't want if rationals are to be immutable.

  – We are forced to implement them as instance variables; the implementation has no opportunity to do any calculations to produce the values.

- That is, the syntax *exposes too much about the implementation.*

# Properties

- To provide greater freedom to class implementors in selecting syntax, Python provides an egregiously general mechanism known as *descriptors*. When an attribute of a class is set to a descriptor object, it behaves differently from usual when selected.

- Descriptors, in their full details, are wonders to behold, so we'll stick with simple uses.

- If we define

  ```
  def _numer(self): return self.__numer
  numer = property(_numer)  # numer is now a descriptor
  ```

  Then fetching a value x.numer (i.e., without parentheses) is translated to x._numer().

- Can't assign to it, any more than you can assign to any function call.

# Properties (contd.)

- The usual shorthand for writing this is to use property as a *decorator*:

```
@property
def numer(self): return self.__numer
```

where the '@' syntax is defined to be equivalent to

```
def numer(self): return self.__numer
numer = property(numer)    # Redefinition.
```