
Python Language Basics, IPython, and Jupyter Notebooks

When I wrote the first edition of this book in 2011 and 2012, there were fewer resources available for learning about doing data analysis in Python. This was partially a chicken-and-egg problem; many libraries that we now take for granted, like `pandas`, `scikit-learn`, and `statsmodels`, were comparatively immature back then. In 2017, there is now a growing literature on data science, data analysis, and machine learning, supplementing the prior works on general-purpose scientific computing geared toward computational scientists, physicists, and professionals in other research fields. There are also excellent books about learning the Python programming language itself and becoming an effective software engineer.

As this book is intended as an introductory text in working with data in Python, I feel it is valuable to have a self-contained overview of some of the most important features of Python's built-in data structures and libraries from the perspective of data manipulation. So, I will only present roughly enough information in this chapter and [Chapter 3](#) to enable you to follow along with the rest of the book.

In my opinion, it is *not* necessary to become proficient at building good software in Python to be able to productively do data analysis. I encourage you to use the IPython shell and Jupyter notebooks to experiment with the code examples and to explore the documentation for the various types, functions, and methods. While I've made best efforts to present the book material in an incremental form, you may occasionally encounter things that have not yet been fully introduced.

Much of this book focuses on table-based analytics and data preparation tools for working with large datasets. In order to use those tools you must often first do some munging to corral messy data into a more nicely tabular (or *structured*) form. Fortunately, Python is an ideal language for rapidly whipping your data into shape. The

greater your facility with Python the language, the easier it will be for you to prepare new datasets for analysis.

Some of the tools in this book are best explored from a live IPython or Jupyter session. Once you learn how to start up IPython and Jupyter, I recommend that you follow along with the examples so you can experiment and try different things. As with any keyboard-driven console-like environment, developing muscle-memory for the common commands is also part of the learning curve.



There are introductory Python concepts that this chapter does not cover, like classes and object-oriented programming, which you may find useful in your foray into data analysis in Python.

To deepen your Python language knowledge, I recommend that you supplement this chapter with the [official Python tutorial](#) and potentially one of the many excellent books on general-purpose Python programming. Some recommendations to get you started include:

- *Python Cookbook*, Third Edition, by David Beazley and Brian K. Jones (O'Reilly)
- *Fluent Python* by Luciano Ramalho (O'Reilly)
- *Effective Python* by Brett Slatkin (Pearson)

2.1 The Python Interpreter

Python is an *interpreted* language. The Python interpreter runs a program by executing one statement at a time. The standard interactive Python interpreter can be invoked on the command line with the `python` command:

```
$ python
Python 3.6.0 | packaged by conda-forge | (default, Jan 13 2017, 23:17:12)
[GCC 4.8.2 20140120 (Red Hat 4.8.2-15)] on linux
Type "help", "copyright", "credits" or "license" for more information.
>>> a = 5
>>> print(a)
5
```

The `>>>` you see is the *prompt* where you'll type code expressions. To exit the Python interpreter and return to the command prompt, you can either type `exit()` or press Ctrl-D.

Running Python programs is as simple as calling `python` with a `.py` file as its first argument. Suppose we had created `hello_world.py` with these contents:

```
print('Hello world')
```

You can run it by executing the following command (the *hello_world.py* file must be in your current working terminal directory):

```
$ python hello_world.py
Hello world
```

While some Python programmers execute all of their Python code in this way, those doing data analysis or scientific computing make use of IPython, an enhanced Python interpreter, or Jupyter notebooks, web-based code notebooks originally created within the IPython project. I give an introduction to using IPython and Jupyter in this chapter and have included a deeper look at IPython functionality in [Appendix A](#). When you use the `%run` command, IPython executes the code in the specified file in the same process, enabling you to explore the results interactively when it's done:

```
$ ipython
Python 3.6.0 | packaged by conda-forge | (default, Jan 13 2017, 23:17:12)
Type "copyright", "credits" or "license" for more information.

IPython 5.1.0 -- An enhanced Interactive Python.
?                -> Introduction and overview of IPython's features.
%quickref        -> Quick reference.
help             -> Python's own help system.
object?         -> Details about 'object', use 'object??' for extra details.

In [1]: %run hello_world.py
Hello world

In [2]:
```

The default IPython prompt adopts the numbered `In [2]:` style compared with the standard `>>>` prompt.

2.2 IPython Basics

In this section, we'll get you up and running with the IPython shell and Jupyter notebook, and introduce you to some of the essential concepts.

Running the IPython Shell

You can launch the IPython shell on the command line just like launching the regular Python interpreter except with the `ipython` command:

```
$ ipython
Python 3.6.0 | packaged by conda-forge | (default, Jan 13 2017, 23:17:12)
Type "copyright", "credits" or "license" for more information.

IPython 5.1.0 -- An enhanced Interactive Python.
?                -> Introduction and overview of IPython's features.
%quickref        -> Quick reference.
help             -> Python's own help system.
```

```
object?    -> Details about 'object', use 'object??' for extra details.
```

```
In [1]: a = 5
```

```
In [2]: a
```

```
Out[2]: 5
```

You can execute arbitrary Python statements by typing them in and pressing Return (or Enter). When you type just a variable into IPython, it renders a string representation of the object:

```
In [5]: import numpy as np
```

```
In [6]: data = {i : np.random.randn() for i in range(7)}
```

```
In [7]: data
```

```
Out[7]:
```

```
{0: -0.20470765948471295,  
 1: 0.47894333805754824,  
 2: -0.5194387150567381,  
 3: -0.55573030434749,  
 4: 1.9657805725027142,  
 5: 1.3934058329729904,  
 6: 0.09290787674371767}
```

The first two lines are Python code statements; the second statement creates a variable named `data` that refers to a newly created Python dictionary. The last line prints the value of `data` in the console.

Many kinds of Python objects are formatted to be more readable, or *pretty-printed*, which is distinct from normal printing with `print`. If you printed the above `data` variable in the standard Python interpreter, it would be much less readable:

```
>>> from numpy.random import randn  
>>> data = {i : randn() for i in range(7)}  
>>> print(data)  
{0: -1.5948255432744511, 1: 0.10569006472787983, 2: 1.972367135977295,  
 3: 0.15455217573074576, 4: -0.24058577449429575, 5: -1.2904897053651216,  
 6: 0.3308507317325902}
```

IPython also provides facilities to execute arbitrary blocks of code (via a somewhat glorified copy-and-paste approach) and whole Python scripts. You can also use the Jupyter notebook to work with larger blocks of code, as we'll soon see.

Running the Jupyter Notebook

One of the major components of the Jupyter project is the *notebook*, a type of interactive document for code, text (with or without markup), data visualizations, and other output. The Jupyter notebook interacts with *kernels*, which are implementations of

the Jupyter interactive computing protocol in any number of programming languages. Python's Jupyter kernel uses the IPython system for its underlying behavior.

To start up Jupyter, run the command `jupyter notebook` in a terminal:

```
$ jupyter notebook
[I 15:20:52.739 NotebookApp] Serving notebooks from local directory:
/home/wesm/code/pydata-book
[I 15:20:52.739 NotebookApp] 0 active kernels
[I 15:20:52.739 NotebookApp] The Jupyter Notebook is running at:
http://localhost:8888/
[I 15:20:52.740 NotebookApp] Use Control-C to stop this server and shut down
all kernels (twice to skip confirmation).
Created new window in existing browser session.
```

On many platforms, Jupyter will automatically open up in your default web browser (unless you start it with `--no-browser`). Otherwise, you can navigate to the HTTP address printed when you started the notebook, here `http://localhost:8888/`. See [Figure 2-1](#) for what this looks like in Google Chrome.



Many people use Jupyter as a local computing environment, but it can also be deployed on servers and accessed remotely. I won't cover those details here, but encourage you to explore this topic on the internet if it's relevant to your needs.

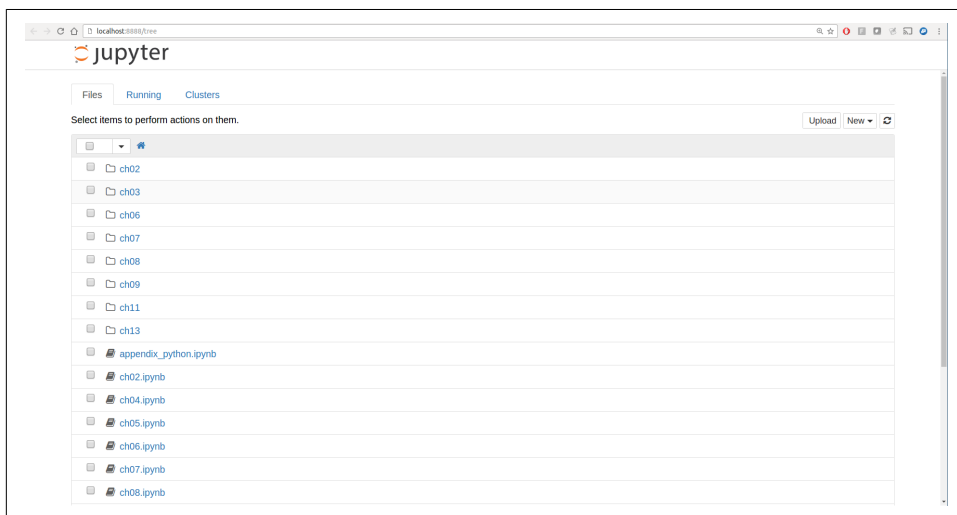


Figure 2-1. Jupyter notebook landing page

To create a new notebook, click the New button and select the “Python 3” or “conda [default]” option. You should see something like [Figure 2-2](#). If this is your first time, try clicking on the empty code “cell” and entering a line of Python code. Then press Shift-Enter to execute it.

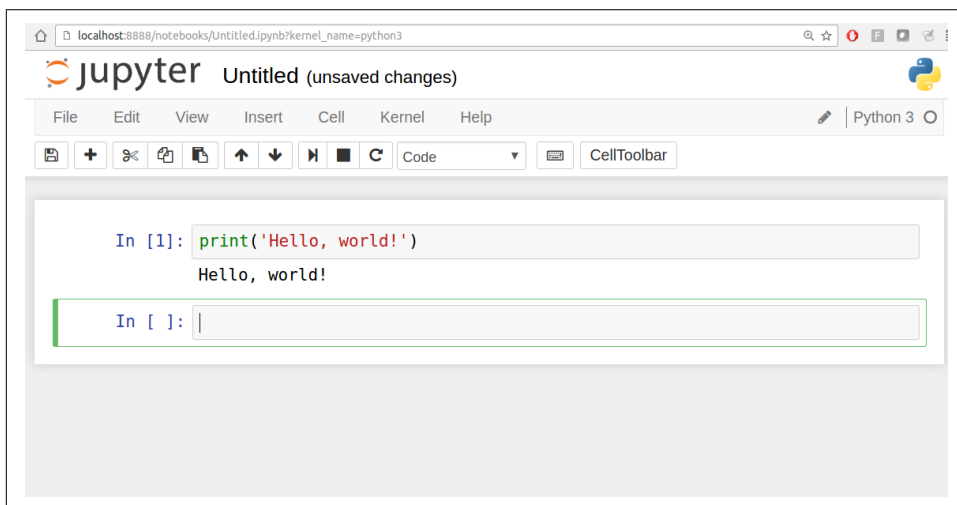


Figure 2-2. Jupyter new notebook view

When you save the notebook (see “Save and Checkpoint” under the notebook File menu), it creates a file with the extension *.ipynb*. This is a self-contained file format that contains all of the content (including any evaluated code output) currently in the notebook. These can be loaded and edited by other Jupyter users. To load an existing notebook, put the file in the same directory where you started the notebook process (or in a subfolder within it), then double-click the name from the landing page. You can try it out with the notebooks from my *wesm/pydata-book* repository on GitHub. See [Figure 2-3](#).

While the Jupyter notebook can feel like a distinct experience from the IPython shell, nearly all of the commands and tools in this chapter can be used in either environment.

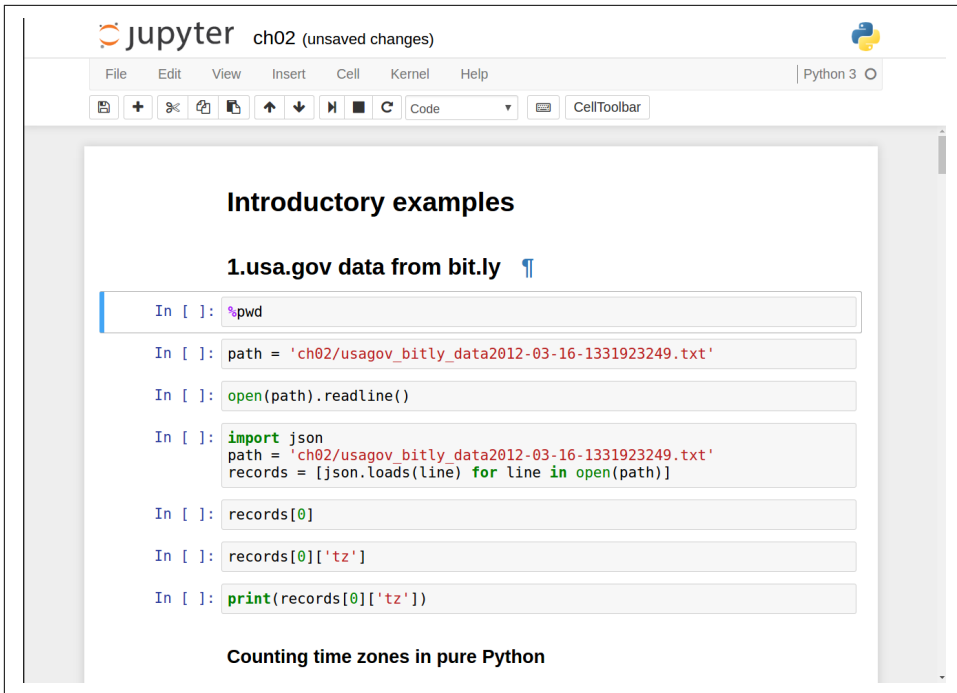


Figure 2-3. Jupyter example view for an existing notebook

Tab Completion

On the surface, the IPython shell looks like a cosmetically different version of the standard terminal Python interpreter (invoked with `python`). One of the major improvements over the standard Python shell is *tab completion*, found in many IDEs or other interactive computing analysis environments. While entering expressions in the shell, pressing the Tab key will search the namespace for any variables (objects, functions, etc.) matching the characters you have typed so far:

```
In [1]: an_apple = 27
```

```
In [2]: an_example = 42
```

```
In [3]: an<Tab>
an_apple    and        an_example  any
```

In this example, note that IPython displayed both the two variables I defined as well as the Python keyword `and` and built-in function `any`. Naturally, you can also complete methods and attributes on any object after typing a period:

```
In [3]: b = [1, 2, 3]
```

```
In [4]: b.<Tab>
b.append  b.count  b.insert  b.reverse
b.clear   b.extend  b.pop     b.sort
b.copy    b.index   b.remove
```

The same goes for modules:

```
In [1]: import datetime
```

```
In [2]: datetime.<Tab>
datetime.date      datetime.MAXYEAR    datetime.timedelta
datetime.datetime  datetime.MINYEAR    datetime.timezone
datetime.datetime_CAPI datetime.time        datetime.tzinfo
```

In the Jupyter notebook and newer versions of IPython (5.0 and higher), the auto-completions show up in a drop-down box rather than as text output.



Note that IPython by default hides methods and attributes starting with underscores, such as magic methods and internal “private” methods and attributes, in order to avoid cluttering the display (and confusing novice users!). These, too, can be tab-completed, but you must first type an underscore to see them. If you prefer to always see such methods in tab completion, you can change this setting in the IPython configuration. See the IPython documentation to find out how to do this.

Tab completion works in many contexts outside of searching the interactive namespace and completing object or module attributes. When typing anything that looks like a file path (even in a Python string), pressing the Tab key will complete anything on your computer’s filesystem matching what you’ve typed:

```
In [7]: datasets/movielens/<Tab>
datasets/movielens/movies.dat    datasets/movielens/README
datasets/movielens/ratings.dat   datasets/movielens/users.dat
```

```
In [7]: path = 'datasets/movielens/<Tab>
datasets/movielens/movies.dat    datasets/movielens/README
datasets/movielens/ratings.dat   datasets/movielens/users.dat
```

Combined with the `%run` command (see “The `%run` Command” on page 25), this functionality can save you many keystrokes.

Another area where tab completion saves time is in the completion of function keyword arguments (and including the `=` sign!). See [Figure 2-4](#).

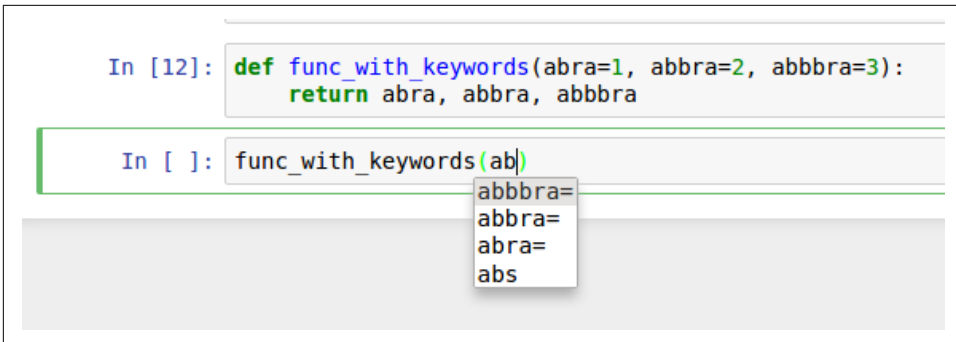


Figure 2-4. Autocomplete function keywords in Jupyter notebook

We'll have a closer look at functions in a little bit.

Introspection

Using a question mark (?) before or after a variable will display some general information about the object:

```
In [8]: b = [1, 2, 3]

In [9]: b?
Type:      list
String Form:[1, 2, 3]
Length:    3
Docstring:
list() -> new empty list
list(iterable) -> new list initialized from iterable's items

In [10]: print?
Docstring:
print(value, ..., sep=' ', end='\n', file=sys.stdout, flush=False)

Prints the values to a stream, or to sys.stdout by default.
Optional keyword arguments:
file:  a file-like object (stream); defaults to the current sys.stdout.
sep:   string inserted between values, default a space.
end:   string appended after the last value, default a newline.
flush: whether to forcibly flush the stream.
Type:  builtin_function_or_method
```

This is referred to as *object introspection*. If the object is a function or instance method, the docstring, if defined, will also be shown. Suppose we'd written the following function (which you can reproduce in IPython or Jupyter):

```
def add_numbers(a, b):
    """
    Add two numbers together

    Returns
    -----
    the_sum : type of arguments
    """
    return a + b
```

Then using `?` shows us the docstring:

```
In [11]: add_numbers?
Signature: add_numbers(a, b)
Docstring:
Add two numbers together

Returns
-----
the_sum : type of arguments
File:    <ipython-input-9-6a548a216e27>
Type:    function
```

Using `??` will also show the function's source code if possible:

```
In [12]: add_numbers??
Signature: add_numbers(a, b)
Source:
def add_numbers(a, b):
    """
    Add two numbers together

    Returns
    -----
    the_sum : type of arguments
    """
    return a + b
File:    <ipython-input-9-6a548a216e27>
Type:    function
```

`?` has a final usage, which is for searching the IPython namespace in a manner similar to the standard Unix or Windows command line. A number of characters combined with the wildcard (`*`) will show all names matching the wildcard expression. For example, we could get a list of all functions in the top-level NumPy namespace containing `load`:

```
In [13]: np.*load*?
np.__loader__
np.load
np.loads
np.loadtxt
np.pkgload
```

The %run Command

You can run any file as a Python program inside the environment of your IPython session using the %run command. Suppose you had the following simple script stored in `ipython_script_test.py`:

```
def f(x, y, z):  
    return (x + y) / z  
  
a = 5  
b = 6  
c = 7.5  
  
result = f(a, b, c)
```

You can execute this by passing the filename to %run:

```
In [14]: %run ipython_script_test.py
```

The script is run in an *empty namespace* (with no imports or other variables defined) so that the behavior should be identical to running the program on the command line using `python script.py`. All of the variables (imports, functions, and globals) defined in the file (up until an exception, if any, is raised) will then be accessible in the IPython shell:

```
In [15]: c  
Out [15]: 7.5  
  
In [16]: result  
Out[16]: 1.4666666666666666
```

If a Python script expects command-line arguments (to be found in `sys.argv`), these can be passed after the file path as though run on the command line.



Should you wish to give a script access to variables already defined in the interactive IPython namespace, use `%run -i` instead of plain `%run`.

In the Jupyter notebook, you may also use the related `%load` magic function, which imports a script into a code cell:

```
>>> %load ipython_script_test.py  
  
def f(x, y, z):  
    return (x + y) / z  
  
a = 5  
b = 6  
c = 7.5
```

```
result = f(a, b, c)
```

Interrupting running code

Pressing Ctrl-C while any code is running, whether a script through %run or a long-running command, will cause a KeyboardInterrupt to be raised. This will cause nearly all Python programs to stop immediately except in certain unusual cases.



When a piece of Python code has called into some compiled extension modules, pressing Ctrl-C will not always cause the program execution to stop immediately. In such cases, you will have to either wait until control is returned to the Python interpreter, or in more dire circumstances, forcibly terminate the Python process.

Executing Code from the Clipboard

If you are using the Jupyter notebook, you can copy and paste code into any code cell and execute it. It is also possible to run code from the clipboard in the IPython shell. Suppose you had the following code in some other application:

```
x = 5
y = 7
if x > 5:
    x += 1

y = 8
```

The most foolproof methods are the %paste and %cpaste magic functions. %paste takes whatever text is in the clipboard and executes it as a single block in the shell:

```
In [17]: %paste
x = 5
y = 7
if x > 5:
    x += 1

y = 8
## -- End pasted text --
```

%cpaste is similar, except that it gives you a special prompt for pasting code into:

```
In [18]: %cpaste
Pasting code; enter '--' alone on the line to stop or use Ctrl-D.
:x = 5
:y = 7
:if x > 5:
:    x += 1
:
```

```
: y = 8
:--
```

With the %cpaste block, you have the freedom to paste as much code as you like before executing it. You might decide to use %cpaste in order to look at the pasted code before executing it. If you accidentally paste the wrong code, you can break out of the %cpaste prompt by pressing Ctrl-C.

Terminal Keyboard Shortcuts

IPython has many keyboard shortcuts for navigating the prompt (which will be familiar to users of the Emacs text editor or the Unix bash shell) and interacting with the shell's command history. Table 2-1 summarizes some of the most commonly used shortcuts. See Figure 2-5 for an illustration of a few of these, such as cursor movement.

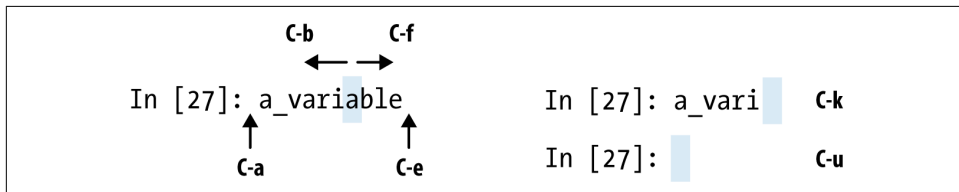


Figure 2-5. Illustration of some keyboard shortcuts in the IPython shell

Table 2-1. Standard IPython keyboard shortcuts

Keyboard shortcut	Description
Ctrl-P or up-arrow	Search backward in command history for commands starting with currently entered text
Ctrl-N or down-arrow	Search forward in command history for commands starting with currently entered text
Ctrl-R	Readline-style reverse history search (partial matching)
Ctrl-Shift-V	Paste text from clipboard
Ctrl-C	Interrupt currently executing code
Ctrl-A	Move cursor to beginning of line
Ctrl-E	Move cursor to end of line
Ctrl-K	Delete text from cursor until end of line
Ctrl-U	Discard all text on current line
Ctrl-F	Move cursor forward one character
Ctrl-B	Move cursor back one character
Ctrl-L	Clear screen

Note that Jupyter notebooks have a largely separate set of keyboard shortcuts for navigation and editing. Since these shortcuts have evolved more rapidly than IPython's, I encourage you to explore the integrated help system in the Jupyter notebook's menus.

About Magic Commands

IPython's special commands (which are not built into Python itself) are known as “magic” commands. These are designed to facilitate common tasks and enable you to easily control the behavior of the IPython system. A magic command is any command prefixed by the percent symbol %. For example, you can check the execution time of any Python statement, such as a matrix multiplication, using the `%timeit` magic function (which will be discussed in more detail later):

```
In [20]: a = np.random.randn(100, 100)
```

```
In [20]: %timeit np.dot(a, a)
10000 loops, best of 3: 20.9 µs per loop
```

Magic commands can be viewed as command-line programs to be run within the IPython system. Many of them have additional “command-line” options, which can all be viewed (as you might expect) using `?`:

```
In [21]: %debug?
Docstring:
::
```

```
%debug [--breakpoint FILE:LINE] [statement [statement ...]]
```

Activate the interactive debugger.

This magic command support two ways of activating debugger.

One **is** to activate debugger before executing code. This way, you can set a **break** point, to step through the code **from the point**. You can use this mode by giving statements to execute **and** optionally a breakpoint.

The other one **is** to activate debugger **in** post-mortem mode. You can activate this mode simply running `%debug` without any argument. If an exception has just occurred, this lets you inspect its stack frames interactively. Note that this will always work only on the last traceback that occurred, so you must call this quickly after an exception that you wish to inspect has fired, because **if** another one occurs, it clobbers the previous one.

If you want IPython to automatically do this on every exception, see the `%pdb` magic **for** more details.

positional arguments:

statement	Code to run in debugger. You can omit this in cell magic mode.
-----------	--

optional arguments:

<code>--breakpoint <FILE:LINE>, -b <FILE:LINE></code>	Set break point at LINE in FILE.
---	--

Magic functions can be used by default without the percent sign, as long as no variable is defined with the same name as the magic function in question. This feature is called *automagic* and can be enabled or disabled with `%automagic`.

Some magic functions behave like Python functions and their output can be assigned to a variable:

```
In [22]: %pwd
Out[22]: '/home/wesm/code/pydata-book'

In [23]: foo = %pwd

In [24]: foo
Out[24]: '/home/wesm/code/pydata-book'
```

Since IPython’s documentation is accessible from within the system, I encourage you to explore all of the special commands available by typing `%quickref` or `%magic`. [Table 2-2](#) highlights some of the most critical ones for being productive in interactive computing and Python development in IPython.

Table 2-2. Some frequently used IPython magic commands

Command	Description
<code>%quickref</code>	Display the IPython Quick Reference Card
<code>%magic</code>	Display detailed documentation for all of the available magic commands
<code>%debug</code>	Enter the interactive debugger at the bottom of the last exception traceback
<code>%hist</code>	Print command input (and optionally output) history
<code>%pdb</code>	Automatically enter debugger after any exception
<code>%paste</code>	Execute preformatted Python code from clipboard
<code>%cpaste</code>	Open a special prompt for manually pasting Python code to be executed
<code>%reset</code>	Delete all variables/names defined in interactive namespace
<code>%page OBJECT</code>	Pretty-print the object and display it through a pager
<code>%run script.py</code>	Run a Python script inside IPython
<code>%prun statement</code>	Execute <i>statement</i> with <code>cProfile</code> and report the profiler output
<code>%time statement</code>	Report the execution time of a single statement
<code>%timeit statement</code>	Run a statement multiple times to compute an ensemble average execution time; useful for timing code with very short execution time
<code>%who</code> , <code>%who_ls</code> , <code>%whos</code>	Display variables defined in interactive namespace, with varying levels of information/verbosity
<code>%xdel variable</code>	Delete a variable and attempt to clear any references to the object in the IPython internals

Matplotlib Integration

One reason for IPython’s popularity in analytical computing is that it integrates well with data visualization and other user interface libraries like `matplotlib`. Don’t worry if you have never used `matplotlib` before; it will be discussed in more detail later in

this book. The `%matplotlib` magic function configures its integration with the IPython shell or Jupyter notebook. This is important, as otherwise plots you create will either not appear (notebook) or take control of the session until closed (shell).

In the IPython shell, running `%matplotlib` sets up the integration so you can create multiple plot windows without interfering with the console session:

```
In [26]: %matplotlib
Using matplotlib backend: Qt4Agg
```

In Jupyter, the command is a little different (Figure 2-6):

```
In [26]: %matplotlib inline
```

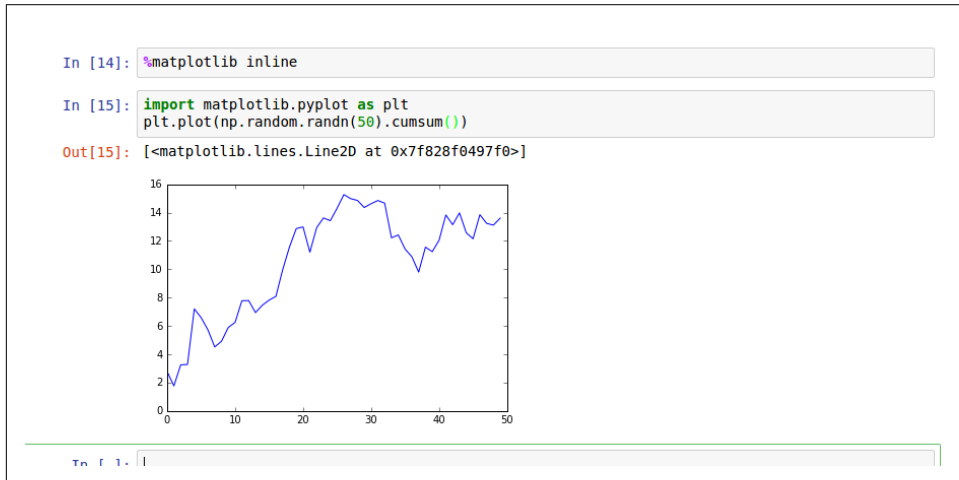


Figure 2-6. Jupyter inline matplotlib plotting

2.3 Python Language Basics

In this section, I will give you an overview of essential Python programming concepts and language mechanics. In the next chapter, I will go into more detail about Python's data structures, functions, and other built-in tools.

Language Semantics

The Python language design is distinguished by its emphasis on readability, simplicity, and explicitness. Some people go so far as to liken it to “executable pseudocode.”

Indentation, not braces

Python uses whitespace (tabs or spaces) to structure code instead of using braces as in many other languages like R, C++, Java, and Perl. Consider a for loop from a sorting algorithm:


```

for x in array:
    if x < pivot:
        less.append(x)
    else:
        greater.append(x)

```

A colon denotes the start of an indented code block after which all of the code must be indented by the same amount until the end of the block.

Love it or hate it, significant whitespace is a fact of life for Python programmers, and in my experience it can make Python code more readable than other languages I've used. While it may seem foreign at first, you will hopefully grow accustomed in time.



I strongly recommend using *four spaces* as your default indentation and replacing tabs with four spaces. Many text editors have a setting that will replace tab stops with spaces automatically (do this!). Some people use tabs or a different number of spaces, with two spaces not being terribly uncommon. By and large, four spaces is the standard adopted by the vast majority of Python programmers, so I recommend doing that in the absence of a compelling reason otherwise.

As you can see by now, Python statements also do not need to be terminated by semicolons. Semicolons can be used, however, to separate multiple statements on a single line:

```
a = 5; b = 6; c = 7
```

Putting multiple statements on one line is generally discouraged in Python as it often makes code less readable.

Everything is an object

An important characteristic of the Python language is the consistency of its *object model*. Every number, string, data structure, function, class, module, and so on exists in the Python interpreter in its own “box,” which is referred to as a *Python object*. Each object has an associated *type* (e.g., *string* or *function*) and internal data. In practice this makes the language very flexible, as even functions can be treated like any other object.

Comments

Any text preceded by the hash mark (pound sign) `#` is ignored by the Python interpreter. This is often used to add comments to code. At times you may also want to exclude certain blocks of code without deleting them. An easy solution is to *comment out* the code:

```

results = []
for line in file_handle:
    # keep the empty lines for now
    # if len(line) == 0:
    #     continue
    results.append(line.replace('foo', 'bar'))

```

Comments can also occur after a line of executed code. While some programmers prefer comments to be placed in the line preceding a particular line of code, this can be useful at times:

```

print("Reached this line") # Simple status report

```

Function and object method calls

You call functions using parentheses and passing zero or more arguments, optionally assigning the returned value to a variable:

```

result = f(x, y, z)
g()

```

Almost every object in Python has attached functions, known as *methods*, that have access to the object's internal contents. You can call them using the following syntax:

```

obj.some_method(x, y, z)

```

Functions can take both *positional* and *keyword* arguments:

```

result = f(a, b, c, d=5, e='foo')

```

More on this later.

Variables and argument passing

When assigning a variable (or *name*) in Python, you are creating a *reference* to the object on the righthand side of the equals sign. In practical terms, consider a list of integers:

```

In [8]: a = [1, 2, 3]

```

Suppose we assign *a* to a new variable *b*:

```

In [9]: b = a

```

In some languages, this assignment would cause the data `[1, 2, 3]` to be copied. In Python, *a* and *b* actually now refer to the same object, the original list `[1, 2, 3]` (see [Figure 2-7](#) for a mockup). You can prove this to yourself by appending an element to *a* and then examining *b*:

```

In [10]: a.append(4)

In [11]: b
Out[11]: [1, 2, 3, 4]

```

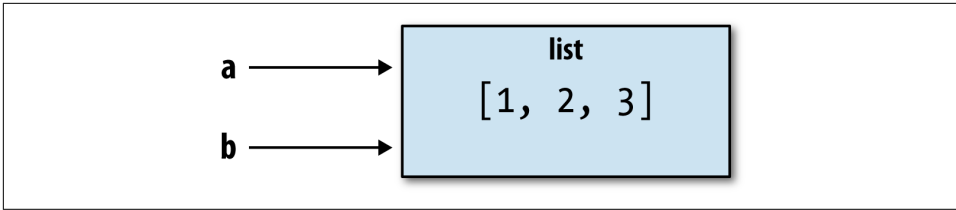


Figure 2-7. Two references for the same object

Understanding the semantics of references in Python and when, how, and why data is copied is especially critical when you are working with larger datasets in Python.



Assignment is also referred to as *binding*, as we are binding a name to an object. Variable names that have been assigned may occasionally be referred to as bound variables.

When you pass objects as arguments to a function, new local variables are created referencing the original objects without any copying. If you bind a new object to a variable inside a function, that change will not be reflected in the parent scope. It is therefore possible to alter the internals of a mutable argument. Suppose we had the following function:

```
def append_element(some_list, element):  
    some_list.append(element)
```

Then we have:

```
In [27]: data = [1, 2, 3]  
  
In [28]: append_element(data, 4)  
  
In [29]: data  
Out[29]: [1, 2, 3, 4]
```

Dynamic references, strong types

In contrast with many compiled languages, such as Java and C++, object *references* in Python have no type associated with them. There is no problem with the following:

```
In [12]: a = 5  
  
In [13]: type(a)  
Out[13]: int  
  
In [14]: a = 'foo'
```

```
In [15]: type(a)
Out[15]: str
```

Variables are names for objects within a particular namespace; the type information is stored in the object itself. Some observers might hastily conclude that Python is not a “typed language.” This is not true; consider this example:

```
In [16]: '5' + 5
-----
TypeError                                Traceback (most recent call last)
<ipython-input-16-f9dbf5f0b234> in <module>()
----> 1 '5' + 5
TypeError: must be str, not int
```

In some languages, such as Visual Basic, the string '5' might get implicitly converted (or *casted*) to an integer, thus yielding 10. Yet in other languages, such as JavaScript, the integer 5 might be casted to a string, yielding the concatenated string '55'. In this regard Python is considered a *strongly typed* language, which means that every object has a specific type (or *class*), and implicit conversions will occur only in certain obvious circumstances, such as the following:

```
In [17]: a = 4.5

In [18]: b = 2

# String formatting, to be visited later
In [19]: print('a is {0}, b is {1}'.format(type(a), type(b)))
a is <class 'float'>, b is <class 'int'>

In [20]: a / b
Out[20]: 2.25
```

Knowing the type of an object is important, and it's useful to be able to write functions that can handle many different kinds of input. You can check that an object is an instance of a particular type using the `isinstance` function:

```
In [21]: a = 5

In [22]: isinstance(a, int)
Out[22]: True
```

`isinstance` can accept a tuple of types if you want to check that an object's type is among those present in the tuple:

```
In [23]: a = 5; b = 4.5

In [24]: isinstance(a, (int, float))
Out[24]: True

In [25]: isinstance(b, (int, float))
Out[25]: True
```

Attributes and methods

Objects in Python typically have both attributes (other Python objects stored “inside” the object) and methods (functions associated with an object that can have access to the object’s internal data). Both of them are accessed via the syntax `obj.attribute_name`:

```
In [1]: a = 'foo'

In [2]: a.<Press Tab>
a.capitalize  a.format      a.isupper     a.rindex      a.strip
a.center      a.index        a.join        a.rjust       a.swapcase
a.count       a.isalnum     a.ljust      a.rpartition  a.title
a.decode      a.isalpha     a.lower      a.rsplit      a.translate
a.encode      a.isdigit     a.lstrip     a.rstrip      a.upper
a.endswith   a.islower    a.partition  a.split       a.zfill
a.expandtabs a.ispace     a.replace    a.splitlines
a.find       a.istitle    a.rfind     a.startswith
```

Attributes and methods can also be accessed by name via the `getattr` function:

```
In [27]: getattr(a, 'split')
Out[27]: <function str.split>
```

In other languages, accessing objects by name is often referred to as “reflection.” While we will not extensively use the functions `getattr` and related functions `hasattr` and `setattr` in this book, they can be used very effectively to write generic, reusable code.

Duck typing

Often you may not care about the type of an object but rather only whether it has certain methods or behavior. This is sometimes called “duck typing,” after the saying “If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it’s a duck.” For example, you can verify that an object is iterable if it implemented the *iterator protocol*. For many objects, this means it has a `__iter__` “magic method,” though an alternative and better way to check is to try using the `iter` function:

```
def isiterable(obj):
    try:
        iter(obj)
        return True
    except TypeError: # not iterable
        return False
```

This function would return `True` for strings as well as most Python collection types:

```
In [29]: isiterable('a string')
Out[29]: True

In [30]: isiterable([1, 2, 3])
```

```
Out[30]: True

In [31]: iterable(5)
Out[31]: False
```

A place where I use this functionality all the time is to write functions that can accept multiple kinds of input. A common case is writing a function that can accept any kind of sequence (list, tuple, ndarray) or even an iterator. You can first check if the object is a list (or a NumPy array) and, if it is not, convert it to be one:

```
if not isinstance(x, list) and iterable(x):
    x = list(x)
```

Imports

In Python a *module* is simply a file with the *.py* extension containing Python code. Suppose that we had the following module:

```
# some_module.py
PI = 3.14159

def f(x):
    return x + 2

def g(a, b):
    return a + b
```

If we wanted to access the variables and functions defined in *some_module.py*, from another file in the same directory we could do:

```
import some_module
result = some_module.f(5)
pi = some_module.PI
```

Or equivalently:

```
from some_module import f, g, PI
result = g(5, PI)
```

By using the *as* keyword you can give imports different variable names:

```
import some_module as sm
from some_module import PI as pi, g as gf

r1 = sm.f(pi)
r2 = gf(6, pi)
```

Binary operators and comparisons

Most of the binary math operations and comparisons are as you might expect:

```
In [32]: 5 - 7
Out[32]: -2
```

```
In [33]: 12 + 21.5
Out[33]: 33.5
```

```
In [34]: 5 <= 2
Out[34]: False
```

See Table 2-3 for all of the available binary operators.

To check if two references refer to the same object, use the `is` keyword. `is not` is also perfectly valid if you want to check that two objects are not the same:

```
In [35]: a = [1, 2, 3]
```

```
In [36]: b = a
```

```
In [37]: c = list(a)
```

```
In [38]: a is b
Out[38]: True
```

```
In [39]: a is not c
Out[39]: True
```

Since `list` always creates a new Python list (i.e., a copy), we can be sure that `c` is distinct from `a`. Comparing with `is` is not the same as the `==` operator, because in this case we have:

```
In [40]: a == c
Out[40]: True
```

A very common use of `is` and `is not` is to check if a variable is `None`, since there is only one instance of `None`:

```
In [41]: a = None
```

```
In [42]: a is None
Out[42]: True
```

Table 2-3. Binary operators

Operation	Description
<code>a + b</code>	Add <code>a</code> and <code>b</code>
<code>a - b</code>	Subtract <code>b</code> from <code>a</code>
<code>a * b</code>	Multiply <code>a</code> by <code>b</code>
<code>a / b</code>	Divide <code>a</code> by <code>b</code>
<code>a // b</code>	Floor-divide <code>a</code> by <code>b</code> , dropping any fractional remainder
<code>a ** b</code>	Raise <code>a</code> to the <code>b</code> power
<code>a & b</code>	True if both <code>a</code> and <code>b</code> are True; for integers, take the bitwise AND
<code>a b</code>	True if either <code>a</code> or <code>b</code> is True; for integers, take the bitwise OR
<code>a ^ b</code>	For booleans, True if <code>a</code> or <code>b</code> is True, but not both; for integers, take the bitwise EXCLUSIVE-OR

Operation	Description
<code>a == b</code>	True if a equals b
<code>a != b</code>	True if a is not equal to b
<code>a <= b, a < b</code>	True if a is less than (less than or equal) to b
<code>a > b, a >= b</code>	True if a is greater than (greater than or equal) to b
<code>a is b</code>	True if a and b reference the same Python object
<code>a is not b</code>	True if a and b reference different Python objects

Mutable and immutable objects

Most objects in Python, such as lists, dicts, NumPy arrays, and most user-defined types (classes), are mutable. This means that the object or values that they contain can be modified:

```
In [43]: a_list = ['foo', 2, [4, 5]]
```

```
In [44]: a_list[2] = (3, 4)
```

```
In [45]: a_list
```

```
Out[45]: ['foo', 2, (3, 4)]
```

Others, like strings and tuples, are immutable:

```
In [46]: a_tuple = (3, 5, (4, 5))
```

```
In [47]: a_tuple[1] = 'four'
```

```
-----
TypeError                                Traceback (most recent call last)
<ipython-input-47-b7966a9ae0f1> in <module>()
----> 1 a_tuple[1] = 'four'
TypeError: 'tuple' object does not support item assignment
```

Remember that just because you *can* mutate an object does not mean that you always *should*. Such actions are known as *side effects*. For example, when writing a function, any side effects should be explicitly communicated to the user in the function’s documentation or comments. If possible, I recommend trying to avoid side effects and *favor immutability*, even though there may be mutable objects involved.

Scalar Types

Python along with its standard library has a small set of built-in types for handling numerical data, strings, boolean (True or False) values, and dates and time. These “single value” types are sometimes called *scalar types* and we refer to them in this book as scalars. See [Table 2-4](#) for a list of the main scalar types. Date and time handling will be discussed separately, as these are provided by the `datetime` module in the standard library.

Table 2-4. Standard Python scalar types

Type	Description
<code>None</code>	The Python “null” value (only one instance of the <code>None</code> object exists)
<code>str</code>	String type; holds Unicode (UTF-8 encoded) strings
<code>bytes</code>	Raw ASCII bytes (or Unicode encoded as bytes)
<code>float</code>	Double-precision (64-bit) floating-point number (note there is no separate <code>double</code> type)
<code>bool</code>	A <code>True</code> or <code>False</code> value
<code>int</code>	Arbitrary precision signed integer

Numeric types

The primary Python types for numbers are `int` and `float`. An `int` can store arbitrarily large numbers:

```
In [48]: ival = 17239871
```

```
In [49]: ival ** 6
```

```
Out[49]: 26254519291092456596965462913230729701102721
```

Floating-point numbers are represented with the Python `float` type. Under the hood each one is a double-precision (64-bit) value. They can also be expressed with scientific notation:

```
In [50]: fval = 7.243
```

```
In [51]: fval2 = 6.78e-5
```

Integer division not resulting in a whole number will always yield a floating-point number:

```
In [52]: 3 / 2
```

```
Out[52]: 1.5
```

To get C-style integer division (which drops the fractional part if the result is not a whole number), use the floor division operator `//`:

```
In [53]: 3 // 2
```

```
Out[53]: 1
```

Strings

Many people use Python for its powerful and flexible built-in string processing capabilities. You can write *string literals* using either single quotes `'` or double quotes `"`:

```
a = 'one way of writing a string'
```

```
b = "another way"
```

For multiline strings with line breaks, you can use triple quotes, either `'''` or `"""`:

```
c = """
This is a longer string that
spans multiple lines
"""
```

It may surprise you that this string `c` actually contains four lines of text; the line breaks after `"""` and after `lines` are included in the string. We can count the new line characters with the `count` method on `c`:

```
In [55]: c.count('\n')
Out[55]: 3
```

Python strings are immutable; you cannot modify a string:

```
In [56]: a = 'this is a string'

In [57]: a[10] = 'f'
-----
TypeError                                 Traceback (most recent call last)
<ipython-input-57-5ca625d1e504> in <module>()
----> 1 a[10] = 'f'
TypeError: 'str' object does not support item assignment

In [58]: b = a.replace('string', 'longer string')

In [59]: b
Out[59]: 'this is a longer string'
```

After this operation, the variable `a` is unmodified:

```
In [60]: a
Out[60]: 'this is a string'
```

Many Python objects can be converted to a string using the `str` function:

```
In [61]: a = 5.6

In [62]: s = str(a)

In [63]: print(s)
5.6
```

Strings are a sequence of Unicode characters and therefore can be treated like other sequences, such as lists and tuples (which we will explore in more detail in the next chapter):

```
In [64]: s = 'python'

In [65]: list(s)
Out[65]: ['p', 'y', 't', 'h', 'o', 'n']

In [66]: s[:3]
Out[66]: 'pyt'
```

The syntax `s[:3]` is called *slicing* and is implemented for many kinds of Python sequences. This will be explained in more detail later on, as it is used extensively in this book.

The backslash character `\` is an *escape character*, meaning that it is used to specify special characters like newline `\n` or Unicode characters. To write a string literal with backslashes, you need to escape them:

```
In [67]: s = '12\\34'
```

```
In [68]: print(s)
12\34
```

If you have a string with a lot of backslashes and no special characters, you might find this a bit annoying. Fortunately you can preface the leading quote of the string with `r`, which means that the characters should be interpreted as is:

```
In [69]: s = r'this\has\no\special\characters'
```

```
In [70]: s
Out[70]: 'this\\has\\no\\special\\characters'
```

The `r` stands for *raw*.

Adding two strings together concatenates them and produces a new string:

```
In [71]: a = 'this is the first half '
```

```
In [72]: b = 'and this is the second half'
```

```
In [73]: a + b
Out[73]: 'this is the first half and this is the second half'
```

String templating or formatting is another important topic. The number of ways to do so has expanded with the advent of Python 3, and here I will briefly describe the mechanics of one of the main interfaces. String objects have a `format` method that can be used to substitute formatted arguments into the string, producing a new string:

```
In [74]: template = '{0:.2f} {1:s} are worth US${2:d}'
```

In this string,

- `{0:.2f}` means to format the first argument as a floating-point number with two decimal places.
- `{1:s}` means to format the second argument as a string.
- `{2:d}` means to format the third argument as an exact integer.

To substitute arguments for these format parameters, we pass a sequence of arguments to the `format` method:

```
In [75]: template.format(4.5560, 'Argentine Pesos', 1)
Out[75]: '4.56 Argentine Pesos are worth US$1'
```

String formatting is a deep topic; there are multiple methods and numerous options and tweaks available to control how values are formatted in the resulting string. To learn more, I recommend consulting the [official Python documentation](#).

I discuss general string processing as it relates to data analysis in more detail in [Chapter 8](#).

Bytes and Unicode

In modern Python (i.e., Python 3.0 and up), Unicode has become the first-class string type to enable more consistent handling of ASCII and non-ASCII text. In older versions of Python, strings were all bytes without any explicit Unicode encoding. You could convert to Unicode assuming you knew the character encoding. Let's look at an example:

```
In [76]: val = "español"

In [77]: val
Out[77]: 'español'
```

We can convert this Unicode string to its UTF-8 bytes representation using the `encode` method:

```
In [78]: val_utf8 = val.encode('utf-8')

In [79]: val_utf8
Out[79]: b'espa\xcc\x3\x1ol'

In [80]: type(val_utf8)
Out[80]: bytes
```

Assuming you know the Unicode encoding of a bytes object, you can go back using the `decode` method:

```
In [81]: val_utf8.decode('utf-8')
Out[81]: 'español'
```

While it's become preferred to use UTF-8 for any encoding, for historical reasons you may encounter data in any number of different encodings:

```
In [82]: val.encode('latin1')
Out[82]: b'espa\xff1ol'

In [83]: val.encode('utf-16')
Out[83]: b'\xff\xfee\x00s\x00p\x00a\x00\xff1\x00o\x00l\x00'

In [84]: val.encode('utf-16le')
Out[84]: b'e\x00s\x00p\x00a\x00\xff1\x00o\x00l\x00'
```

It is most common to encounter bytes objects in the context of working with files, where implicitly decoding all data to Unicode strings may not be desired.

Though you may seldom need to do so, you can define your own byte literals by prefixing a string with `b`:

```
In [85]: bytes_val = b'this is bytes'

In [86]: bytes_val
Out[86]: b'this is bytes'

In [87]: decoded = bytes_val.decode('utf8')

In [88]: decoded # this is str (Unicode) now
Out[88]: 'this is bytes'
```

Booleans

The two boolean values in Python are written as `True` and `False`. Comparisons and other conditional expressions evaluate to either `True` or `False`. Boolean values are combined with the `and` and `or` keywords:

```
In [89]: True and True
Out[89]: True

In [90]: False or True
Out[90]: True
```

Type casting

The `str`, `bool`, `int`, and `float` types are also functions that can be used to cast values to those types:

```
In [91]: s = '3.14159'

In [92]: fval = float(s)

In [93]: type(fval)
Out[93]: float

In [94]: int(fval)
Out[94]: 3

In [95]: bool(fval)
Out[95]: True

In [96]: bool(0)
Out[96]: False
```

None

None is the Python null value type. If a function does not explicitly return a value, it implicitly returns None:

```
In [97]: a = None

In [98]: a is None
Out[98]: True

In [99]: b = 5

In [100]: b is not None
Out[100]: True
```

None is also a common default value for function arguments:

```
def add_and_maybe_multiply(a, b, c=None):
    result = a + b

    if c is not None:
        result = result * c

    return result
```

While a technical point, it's worth bearing in mind that None is not only a reserved keyword but also a unique instance of NoneType:

```
In [101]: type(None)
Out[101]: NoneType
```

Dates and times

The built-in Python datetime module provides datetime, date, and time types. The datetime type, as you may imagine, combines the information stored in date and time and is the most commonly used:

```
In [102]: from datetime import datetime, date, time

In [103]: dt = datetime(2011, 10, 29, 20, 30, 21)

In [104]: dt.day
Out[104]: 29

In [105]: dt.minute
Out[105]: 30
```

Given a datetime instance, you can extract the equivalent date and time objects by calling methods on the datetime of the same name:

```
In [106]: dt.date()
Out[106]: datetime.date(2011, 10, 29)
```

```
In [107]: dt.time()
Out[107]: datetime.time(20, 30, 21)
```

The `strftime` method formats a `datetime` as a string:

```
In [108]: dt.strftime('%m/%d/%Y %H:%M')
Out[108]: '10/29/2011 20:30'
```

Strings can be converted (parsed) into `datetime` objects with the `strptime` function:

```
In [109]: datetime.strptime('20091031', '%Y%m%d')
Out[109]: datetime.datetime(2009, 10, 31, 0, 0)
```

See [Table 2-5](#) for a full list of format specifications.

When you are aggregating or otherwise grouping time series data, it will occasionally be useful to replace time fields of a series of `datetimes`—for example, replacing the minute and second fields with zero:

```
In [110]: dt.replace(minute=0, second=0)
Out[110]: datetime.datetime(2011, 10, 29, 20, 0)
```

Since `datetime.datetime` is an immutable type, methods like these always produce new objects.

The difference of two `datetime` objects produces a `datetime.timedelta` type:

```
In [111]: dt2 = datetime(2011, 11, 15, 22, 30)

In [112]: delta = dt2 - dt

In [113]: delta
Out[113]: datetime.timedelta(17, 7179)

In [114]: type(delta)
Out[114]: datetime.timedelta
```

The output `timedelta(17, 7179)` indicates that the `timedelta` encodes an offset of 17 days and 7,179 seconds.

Adding a `timedelta` to a `datetime` produces a new shifted `datetime`:

```
In [115]: dt
Out[115]: datetime.datetime(2011, 10, 29, 20, 30, 21)

In [116]: dt + delta
Out[116]: datetime.datetime(2011, 11, 15, 22, 30)
```

Table 2-5. Datetime format specification (ISO C89 compatible)

Type	Description
%Y	Four-digit year
%y	Two-digit year

Type	Description
%m	Two-digit month [01, 12]
%d	Two-digit day [01, 31]
%H	Hour (24-hour clock) [00, 23]
%I	Hour (12-hour clock) [01, 12]
%M	Two-digit minute [00, 59]
%S	Second [00, 61] (seconds 60, 61 account for leap seconds)
%w	Weekday as integer [0 (Sunday), 6]
%U	Week number of the year [00, 53]; Sunday is considered the first day of the week, and days before the first Sunday of the year are “week 0”
%W	Week number of the year [00, 53]; Monday is considered the first day of the week, and days before the first Monday of the year are “week 0”
%z	UTC time zone offset as +HHMM or -HHMM; empty if time zone naive
%F	Shortcut for %Y-%m-%d (e.g., 2012-4-18)
%D	Shortcut for %m/%d/%y (e.g., 04/18/12)

Control Flow

Python has several built-in keywords for conditional logic, loops, and other standard *control flow* concepts found in other programming languages.

if, elif, and else

The `if` statement is one of the most well-known control flow statement types. It checks a condition that, if `True`, evaluates the code in the block that follows:

```
if x < 0:
    print('It's negative')
```

An `if` statement can be optionally followed by one or more `elif` blocks and a catch-all `else` block if all of the conditions are `False`:

```
if x < 0:
    print('It's negative')
elif x == 0:
    print('Equal to zero')
elif 0 < x < 5:
    print('Positive but smaller than 5')
else:
    print('Positive and larger than or equal to 5')
```

If any of the conditions is `True`, no further `elif` or `else` blocks will be reached. With a compound condition using `and` or `or`, conditions are evaluated left to right and will short-circuit:

```
In [117]: a = 5; b = 7

In [118]: c = 8; d = 4
```



```
In [119]: if a < b or c > d:
.....:     print('Made it')
Made it
```

In this example, the comparison `c > d` never gets evaluated because the first comparison was `True`.

It is also possible to chain comparisons:

```
In [120]: 4 > 3 > 2 > 1
Out[120]: True
```

for loops

for loops are for iterating over a collection (like a list or tuple) or an iterator. The standard syntax for a for loop is:

```
for value in collection:
    # do something with value
```

You can advance a for loop to the next iteration, skipping the remainder of the block, using the `continue` keyword. Consider this code, which sums up integers in a list and skips `None` values:

```
sequence = [1, 2, None, 4, None, 5]
total = 0
for value in sequence:
    if value is None:
        continue
    total += value
```

A for loop can be exited altogether with the `break` keyword. This code sums elements of the list until a 5 is reached:

```
sequence = [1, 2, 0, 4, 6, 5, 2, 1]
total_until_5 = 0
for value in sequence:
    if value == 5:
        break
    total_until_5 += value
```

The `break` keyword only terminates the innermost for loop; any outer for loops will continue to run:

```
In [121]: for i in range(4):
.....:     for j in range(4):
.....:         if j > i:
.....:             break
.....:         print((i, j))
.....:
(0, 0)
(1, 0)
```

```
(1, 1)
(2, 0)
(2, 1)
(2, 2)
(3, 0)
(3, 1)
(3, 2)
(3, 3)
```

As we will see in more detail, if the elements in the collection or iterator are sequences (tuples or lists, say), they can be conveniently *unpacked* into variables in the for loop statement:

```
for a, b, c in iterator:
    # do something
```

while loops

A while loop specifies a condition and a block of code that is to be executed until the condition evaluates to False or the loop is explicitly ended with break:

```
x = 256
total = 0
while x > 0:
    if total > 500:
        break
    total += x
    x = x // 2
```

pass

pass is the “no-op” statement in Python. It can be used in blocks where no action is to be taken (or as a placeholder for code not yet implemented); it is only required because Python uses whitespace to delimit blocks:

```
if x < 0:
    print('negative!')
elif x == 0:
    # TODO: put something smart here
    pass
else:
    print('positive!')
```

range

The range function returns an iterator that yields a sequence of evenly spaced integers:

```
In [122]: range(10)
Out[122]: range(0, 10)
```

```
In [123]: list(range(10))
Out[123]: [0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]
```

Both a start, end, and step (which may be negative) can be given:

```
In [124]: list(range(0, 20, 2))
Out[124]: [0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18]
```

```
In [125]: list(range(5, 0, -1))
Out[125]: [5, 4, 3, 2, 1]
```

As you can see, `range` produces integers up to but not including the endpoint. A common use of `range` is for iterating through sequences by index:

```
seq = [1, 2, 3, 4]
for i in range(len(seq)):
    val = seq[i]
```

While you can use functions like `list` to store all the integers generated by `range` in some other data structure, often the default iterator form will be what you want. This snippet sums all numbers from 0 to 99,999 that are multiples of 3 or 5:

```
sum = 0
for i in range(100000):
    # % is the modulo operator
    if i % 3 == 0 or i % 5 == 0:
        sum += i
```

While the range generated can be arbitrarily large, the memory use at any given time may be very small.

Ternary expressions

A *ternary expression* in Python allows you to combine an `if-else` block that produces a value into a single line or expression. The syntax for this in Python is:

```
value = true-expr if condition else false-expr
```

Here, *true-expr* and *false-expr* can be any Python expressions. It has the identical effect as the more verbose:

```
if condition:
    value = true-expr
else:
    value = false-expr
```

This is a more concrete example:

```
In [126]: x = 5

In [127]: 'Non-negative' if x >= 0 else 'Negative'
Out[127]: 'Non-negative'
```

As with `if-else` blocks, only one of the expressions will be executed. Thus, the “if” and “else” sides of the ternary expression could contain costly computations, but only the true branch is ever evaluated.

While it may be tempting to always use ternary expressions to condense your code, realize that you may sacrifice readability if the condition as well as the true and false expressions are very complex.