PyTorch for Absolute Beginners: Zero to Hero Guide

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1. What is PyTorch?

PyTorch is a powerful, open-source machine learning library developed by Facebook (Meta). Think of it as a toolkit that makes building and training neural networks much easier.

Why PyTorch?

- Easy to learn: Pythonic syntax that feels natural
- **Dynamic**: You can change your network structure on the fly
- Powerful: Used by researchers and companies worldwide
- **Great community**: Lots of tutorials, examples, and help available

Real-world applications:

- Image recognition (like photo tagging on social media)
- Natural language processing (chatbots, translation)
- Recommendation systems (Netflix, Spotify suggestions)
- Self-driving cars
- Medical diagnosis

2. Installation and Setup

Installing PyTorch

```
bash

# For CPU only (good for learning)

pip install torch torchvision torchaudio

# For GPU (if you have NVIDIA GPU)

pip install torch torchvision torchaudio --index-url https://download.pytorch.org/whl/cu118
```

Verify Installation

python			

```
import torch

print(f"PyTorch version: {torch.__version__}")

print(f"CUDA available: {torch.cuda.is_available()}")

# This should print your PyTorch version

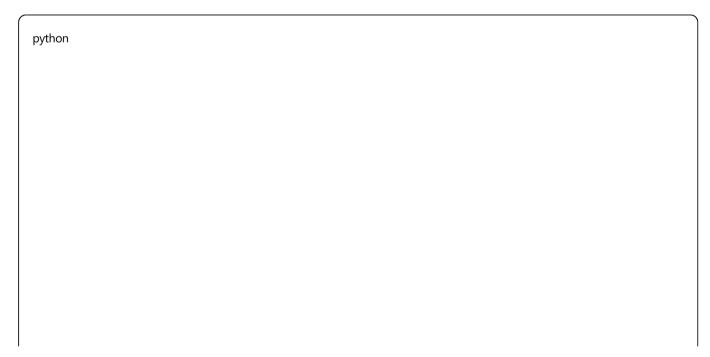
# CUDA shows if you can use GPU acceleration
```

Practice Exercise 1: Run the code above and note down your PyTorch version. Don't worry if CUDA shows False - CPU is fine for learning!

3. Understanding Tensors

Tensors are the fundamental building blocks of PyTorch. Think of them as multi-dimensional arrays that can run on GPUs.

What are Tensors?



```
import torch
# Scalar (OD tensor) - just a single number
scalar = torch.tensor(5)
print(f"Scalar: {scalar}")
print(f"Shape: {scalar.shape}")
# Vector (1D tensor) - like a list of numbers
vector = torch.tensor([1, 2, 3, 4])
print(f"Vector: {vector}")
print(f"Shape: {vector.shape}")
# Matrix (2D tensor) - like a spreadsheet
matrix = torch.tensor([[1, 2], [3, 4], [5, 6]])
print(f"Matrix:\n{matrix}")
print(f"Shape: {matrix.shape}")
# 3D tensor - like a stack of matrices
tensor_3d = torch.tensor([[[1, 2], [3, 4]], [[5, 6], [7, 8]]])
print(f"3D Tensor:\n{tensor_3d}")
print(f"Shape: {tensor_3d.shape}")
```

Creating Tensors

```
# Create tensors with specific values
zeros = torch.zeros(\frac{3}{4}) # 3x4 tensor of zeros
ones = torch.ones(\frac{2}{3}) # 2x3 tensor of ones
random = torch.randn(2, 2) # 2x2 tensor with random values
print("Zeros:\n", zeros)
print("Ones:\n", ones)
print("Random:\n", random)
# Create tensor from Python list
from_list = torch.tensor([[1, 2, 3], [4, 5, 6]])
print("From list:\n", from_list)
# Create tensor with specific data type
float_tensor = torch.tensor([1, 2, 3], dtype=torch.float32)
int_tensor = torch.tensor([1, 2, 3], dtype=torch.int64)
print(f"Float tensor: {float_tensor}, dtype: {float_tensor.dtype}")
print(f"Int tensor: {int_tensor}, dtype: {int_tensor.dtype}")
```

Practice Exercise 2: Create the following tensors:

- 1. A 5x5 matrix of zeros
- 2. A 1D tensor with values [10, 20, 30, 40, 50]
- 3. A 2x3 matrix of random numbers
- 4. A 3x3 identity matrix (hint: use (torch.eye()))

4. Basic Tensor Operations

Mathematical Operations

```
python
# Create sample tensors
a = torch.tensor([1, 2, 3])
b = torch.tensor([4, 5, 6])
# Basic arithmetic
print("Addition:", a + b)
print("Subtraction:", a - b)
print("Multiplication:", a * b)
print("Division:", a / b)
# Matrix operations
matrix_a = torch.tensor([[1, 2], [3, 4]])
matrix_b = torch.tensor([[5, 6], [7, 8]])
print("Matrix addition:\n", matrix_a + matrix_b)
print("Matrix multiplication:\n", torch.matmul(matrix_a, matrix_b))
# or use @ operator
print("Matrix multiplication (@ operator):\n", matrix_a @ matrix_b)
```

Reshaping Tensors

```
# Create a tensor

x = torch.tensor([[1, 2, 3, 4], [5, 6, 7, 8]])

print("Original shape:", x.shape)

print("Original tensor:\n", x)

# Reshape to different dimensions

reshaped = x.view(4, 2) # 4 rows, 2 columns

print("Reshaped (4, 2):\n", reshaped)

reshaped2 = x.view(8) # Flatten to 1D

print("Flattened:", reshaped2)

# -1 means "figure out this dimension automatically"

auto_reshape = x.view(-1, 1) # Make it a column vector

print("Auto-reshaped to column:\n", auto_reshape)
```

Indexing and Slicing

Practice Exercise 3:

- 1. Create two 3x3 matrices with random values
- 2. Add them together
- 3. Multiply them using matrix multiplication
- 4. Reshape the result into a 1D tensor
- 5. Extract the first 5 elements

5. Automatic Differentiation (Autograd)

This is where PyTorch becomes magical! Autograd automatically calculates gradients (derivatives) for you, which is essential for training neural networks.

Understanding Gradients

```
python

# Create a tensor that requires gradients

x = torch.tensor(2.0, requires_grad=True)

print(f"x = {x}")

# Define a function

y = x**2 + 3*x + 1

print(f"y = x² + 3x + 1 = {y}")

# Calculate the gradient (derivative)

y.backward() # This computes dy/dx

print(f"Gradient dy/dx = {x.grad}")

# Mathematical check: dy/dx = 2x + 3 = 2(2) + 3 = 7 ✓
```

More Complex Example

```
# Multiple variables

x = torch.tensor(1.0, requires_grad=True)

y = torch.tensor(2.0, requires_grad=True)

# More complex function

z = x^{**2} + y^{**3} + x^{*}y

print(f''z = x^{2} + y^{3} + xy = \{z\}'')

# Calculate gradients

z.backward()

print(f''\partial z/\partial x = \{x.grad\}'') # Should be 2x + y = 2(1) + 2 = 4

print(f''\partial z/\partial y = \{y.grad\}'') # Should be 3y^{2} + x = 3(4) + 1 = 13
```

Vector Gradients

```
python

# Reset gradients (important!)
if x.grad is not None:
    x.grad.zero_()
if y.grad is not None:
    y.grad.zero_()

# Vector operations
x = torch.tensor([1.0, 2.0], requires_grad=True)
y = torch.sum(x**2) # Sum of squares

y.backward()
print(f"x = {x}")
print(f"y = sum(x²) = {y}")
print(f"Gradient: {x.grad}") # Should be [2*1, 2*2] = [2, 4]
```

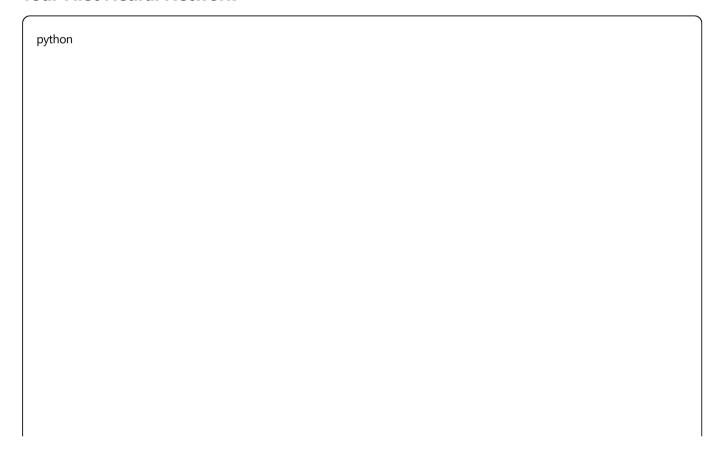
Practice Exercise 4:

- 1. Create a tensor x = 3.0 with requires_grad=True
- 2. Define $y = x^3 2x^2 + x 5$
- 3. Calculate the gradient
- 4. Verify your answer: $dy/dx = 3x^2 4x + 1$

6. Building Neural Networks

Neural networks in PyTorch are built using the (torch.nn) module. Let's start simple!

Your First Neural Network



```
import torch
import torch.nn as nn
# Define a simple neural network
class <a href="SimpleNet">SimpleNet</a>(nn.Module):
  def __init__(self):
     super(SimpleNet, self).__init__()
     # Define layers
     self.layer1 = nn.Linear(2, 4) # Input: 2 features, Output: 4 neurons
     self.layer2 = nn.Linear(4, 1) # Input: 4 neurons, Output: 1 neuron
     self.activation = nn.ReLU() # Activation function
  def forward(self, x):
     # Define how data flows through the network
     x = self.layer1(x)
     x = self.activation(x)
     x = self.layer2(x)
     return x
# Create the network
net = SimpleNet()
print(net)
# Test with dummy data
input_data = torch.tensor([[1.0, 2.0], [3.0, 4.0]])
output = net(input_data)
print(f"Input: {input_data}")
print(f"Output: {output}")
```

Understanding the Components

```
python
# Let's break down what each part does
# 1. Linear Layer (Fully Connected)
linear = nn.Linear(3, 2) # 3 inputs \rightarrow 2 outputs
print("Linear layer weights shape:", linear.weight.shape)
print("Linear layer bias shape:", linear.bias.shape)
# 2. Activation Functions
relu = nn.ReLU() # ReLU: max(0, x)
sigmoid = nn.Sigmoid() # Sigmoid: 1/(1+e^{-x})
tanh = nn.Tanh() # Tanh: (e^x - e^(-x))/(e^x + e^(-x))
# Test activation functions
test_input = torch.tensor([-2.0, -1.0, 0.0, 1.0, 2.0])
print("Input:", test_input)
print("ReLU:", relu(test_input))
print("Sigmoid:", sigmoid(test_input))
print("Tanh:", tanh(test_input))
```

A More Complete Example

```
class BetterNet(nn.Module):
  def __init__(self, input_size, hidden_size, output_size):
    super(BetterNet, self).__init__()
     # Define layers
    self.fc1 = nn.Linear(input_size, hidden_size)
     self.fc2 = nn.Linear(hidden_size, hidden_size)
    self.fc3 = nn.Linear(hidden_size, output_size)
     # Activation and dropout
    self.relu = nn.ReLU()
    self.dropout = nn.Dropout(0.1) # Helps prevent overfitting
  def forward(self, x):
    # Layer 1
    x = self.fc1(x)
    x = self.relu(x)
    x = self.dropout(x)
    # Layer 2
    x = self.fc2(x)
    x = self.relu(x)
    x = self.dropout(x)
     # Output layer (no activation for regression)
    x = self.fc3(x)
     return x
# Create network: 10 inputs → 20 hidden → 20 hidden → 1 output
model = BetterNet(10, 20, 1)
print(f"Model has {sum(p.numel() for p in model.parameters())} parameters")
```

```
# Test with random data

test_input = torch.randn(5, 10) # 5 samples, 10 features each

output = model(test_input)

print(f"Input shape: {test_input.shape}")

print(f"Output shape: {output.shape}")
```

Practice Exercise 5: Create a neural network with:

• Input size: 5

• First hidden layer: 10 neurons with ReLU

• Second hidden layer: 8 neurons with ReLU

• Output layer: 3 neurons Test it with random input data.

7. Training Your First Model

Now let's learn how to actually train a neural network! We'll solve a simple regression problem.

The Training Process



```
import torch
import torch.nn as nn
import torch.optim as optim
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
# Step 1: Create synthetic data
# Let's learn the function y = 2x + 1 + noise
torch.manual_seed(42) # For reproducible results
n_samples = 100
X = torch.randn(n_samples, 1) # Input features
y = 2 * X + 1 + 0.1 * torch.randn(n_samples, 1) # Target values
print(f"X shape: {X.shape}")
print(f"y shape: {y.shape}")
print(f"First 5 samples:")
print(f"X: {X[:5].flatten()}")
print(f"y: {y[:5].flatten()}")
```

Define the Model

```
class LinearRegression(nn.Module):

def __init__(self):
    super(LinearRegression, self).__init__()
    self.linear = nn.Linear(1, 1) # 1 input, 1 output

def forward(self, x):
    return self.linear(x)

# Create model, loss function, and optimizer
model = LinearRegression()
criterion = nn.MSELoss() # Mean Squared Error
optimizer = optim.SGD(model.parameters(), lr=0.01) # Stochastic Gradient Descent

print("Initial parameters:")
for name, param in model.named_parameters():
    print(f"{name}: {param.data}")
```

Training Loop

```
# Training parameters
num_epochs = 1000
losses = []
# Training loop
for epoch in range(num_epochs):
  # Forward pass
  predictions = model(X)
  loss = criterion(predictions, y)
  # Backward pass
  optimizer.zero_grad() # Clear gradients
  loss.backward()
                     # Calculate gradients
                     # Update parameters
  optimizer.step()
  # Store loss for plotting
  losses.append(loss.item())
  # Print progress
  if (epoch + 1) \% 100 == 0:
    print(f'Epoch [{epoch+1}/{num_epochs}], Loss: {loss.item():.4f}')
print("\nFinal parameters:")
for name, param in model.named_parameters():
  print(f"{name}: {param.data}")
print(f''\setminus nTarget was: y = 2x + 1")
print(f"Model learned: y = {model.linear.weight.item():.3f}x + {model.linear.bias.item():.3f}")
```

Visualize Results

```
python
# Plot training loss
plt.figure(figsize=(12, 4))
plt.subplot(1, 2, 1)
plt.plot(losses)
plt.title('Training Loss')
plt.xlabel('Epoch')
plt.ylabel('Loss')
plt.grid(True)
# Plot predictions vs actual
plt.subplot(1, 2, 2)
with torch.no_grad(): # Don't calculate gradients for inference
  predictions = model(X)
plt.scatter(X.numpy(), y.numpy(), alpha=0.5, label='Actual')
plt.scatter(X.numpy(), predictions.numpy(), alpha=0.5, label='Predicted')
plt.xlabel('X')
plt.ylabel('y')
plt.legend()
plt.title('Actual vs Predicted')
plt.grid(True)
plt.tight_layout()
plt.show()
```

Making Predictions

```
# Test on new data
new_X = torch.tensor([[0.5], [1.0], [1.5], [2.0]])

model.eval() # Set to evaluation mode
with torch.no_grad():
    new_predictions = model(new_X)

print("Predictions on new data:")
for i in range(len(new_X)):
    x_val = new_X[i].item()
    pred = new_predictions[i].item()
    actual = 2 * x_val + 1 # True function
    print(f"X={x_val:.1f}: Predicted={pred:.3f}, Actual={actual:.1f}")
```

Practice Exercise 6:

- 1. Create data for the function $y = 0.5x^2 + 3x 2$
- 2. Design a neural network to learn this function
- 3. Train it and visualize the results
- 4. How well does it perform?

8. Working with Data

Real-world data doesn't come as nice tensors. Let's learn how to handle datasets properly.

DataLoader and Datasets

```
from torch.utils.data import Dataset, DataLoader
import numpy as np
class CustomDataset(Dataset):
  def __init__(self, X, y):
    self.X = torch.FloatTensor(X)
    self.y = torch.FloatTensor(y)
  def _len_(self):
    return len(self.X)
  def __getitem__(self, idx):
    return self.X[idx], self.y[idx]
# Create sample data
np.random.seed(42)
n_samples = 1000
X_data = np.random.randn(n_samples, 5) # 5 features
y_data = np.sum(X_data, axis=1) + np.random.randn(n_samples) * 0.1
# Create dataset and dataloader
dataset = CustomDataset(X_data, y_data)
dataloader = DataLoader(dataset, batch_size=32, shuffle=True)
print(f"Dataset size: {len(dataset)}")
print(f"Number of batches: {len(dataloader)}")
# Look at one batch
for batch_X, batch_y in dataloader:
  print(f"Batch X shape: {batch_X.shape}")
```

print(f"Batch y shape: {batch_y.shape}")
break

Training with Batches

Training with batt			
python			

```
class MultiFeatureNet(nn.Module):
  def __init__(self):
    super(MultiFeatureNet, self).__init__()
    self.fc1 = nn.Linear(5, 10)
     self.fc2 = nn.Linear(10, 5)
     self.fc3 = nn.Linear(5, 1)
     self.relu = nn.ReLU()
    self.dropout = nn.Dropout(0.2)
  def forward(self, x):
    x = self.relu(self.fc1(x))
    x = self.dropout(x)
    x = self.relu(self.fc2(x))
    x = self.dropout(x)
    x = self.fc3(x)
    return x.squeeze() # Remove extra dimension
# Create model, loss, optimizer
model = MultiFeatureNet()
criterion = nn.MSELoss()
optimizer = optim.Adam(model.parameters(), lr=0.001)
# Training with batches
num_epochs = 50
train_losses = []
for epoch in range(num_epochs):
  epoch_{loss} = 0.0
  for batch_X, batch_y in dataloader:
     # Forward pass
     predictions = model(batch_X)
```

```
loss = criterion(predictions, batch_y)
     # Backward pass
    optimizer.zero_grad()
    loss.backward()
     optimizer.step()
     epoch_loss += loss.item()
  # Average loss for this epoch
  avg_loss = epoch_loss / len(dataloader)
  train_losses.append(avg_loss)
  if (epoch + 1) \% 10 == 0:
    print(f'Epoch [{epoch+1}/{num_epochs}], Average Loss: {avg_loss:.4f}')
# Plot training progress
plt.plot(train_losses)
plt.title('Training Loss Over Time')
plt.xlabel('Epoch')
plt.ylabel('Loss')
plt.grid(True)
plt.show()
```

Data Preprocessing

```
# Common preprocessing techniques
from sklearn.preprocessing import StandardScaler
from sklearn.model_selection import train_test_split
# Split data into train/test
X_train, X_test, y_train, y_test = train_test_split(
  X_data, y_data, test_size=0.2, random_state=42
# Normalize features (important for neural networks!)
scaler = StandardScaler()
X_train_scaled = scaler.fit_transform(X_train)
X_test_scaled = scaler.transform(X_test)
print("Before scaling:")
print(f"X_train mean: {X_train.mean(axis=0)}")
print(f"X_train std: {X_train.std(axis=0)}")
print("\nAfter scaling:")
print(f"X_train_scaled mean: {X_train_scaled.mean(axis=0)}")
print(f"X_train_scaled std: {X_train_scaled.std(axis=0)}")
# Create datasets
train_dataset = CustomDataset(X_train_scaled, y_train)
test_dataset = CustomDataset(X_test_scaled, y_test)
train_loader = DataLoader(train_dataset, batch_size=32, shuffle=True)
test_loader = DataLoader(test_dataset, batch_size=32, shuffle=False)
```

Practice Exercise 7:

- 1. Create a dataset with 3 features and 1000 samples
- 2. Split it into train/test sets (80/20)
- 3. Normalize the features
- 4. Create DataLoaders with batch size 16
- 5. Train a model and evaluate on test set

9. Complete Example: Image Classification

Let's put everything together with a real computer vision task using the famous MNIST dataset (handwritten digits).

Loading MNIST Data

python		

```
import torchvision
import torchvision.transforms as transforms
from torch.utils.data import DataLoader
# Define data transformations
transform = transforms.Compose([
  transforms.ToTensor(), # Convert PIL image to tensor
  transforms.Normalize((0.1307,), (0.3081,)) # Normalize with MNIST mean/std
# Download and load MNIST dataset
train_dataset = torchvision.datasets.MNIST(
  root='./data',
  train=True,
  download=True,
  transform=transform
test_dataset = torchvision.datasets.MNIST(
  root='./data',
  train=False,
  download=True,
  transform=transform
# Create data loaders
train_loader = DataLoader(train_dataset, batch_size=64, shuffle=True)
test_loader = DataLoader(test_dataset, batch_size=64, shuffle=False)
print(f"Training samples: {len(train_dataset)}")
print(f"Test samples: {len(test_dataset)}")
```

```
# Look at the data
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
# Get one batch of training data
dataiter = iter(train_loader)
images, labels = next(dataiter)
print(f"Batch shape: {images.shape}") # [batch_size, channels, height, width]
print(f"Labels shape: {labels.shape}")
# Visualize some images
fig, axes = plt.subplots(2, 4, figsize=(10, 5))
for i in range(8):
  row, col = i // 4, i % 4
  axes[row, col].imshow(images[i].squeeze(), cmap='gray')
  axes[row, col].set_title(f'Label: {labels[i]}')
  axes[row, col].axis('off')
plt.tight_layout()
plt.show()
```

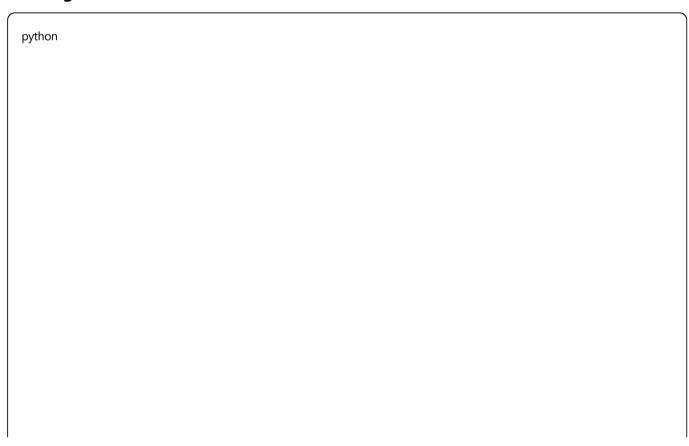
Define CNN Model

```
class CNN(nn.Module):
  def __init__(self):
    super(CNN, self).__init__()
    # Convolutional layers
    self.conv1 = nn.Conv2d(1, 32, kernel_size=3, padding=1) # 28x28 -> 28x28
    self.conv2 = nn.Conv2d(32, 64, kernel_size=3, padding=1) # 28x28 -> 28x28
    # Pooling layer
    self.pool = nn.MaxPool2d(2, 2) # 28x28 -> 14x14, then 14x14 -> 7x7
    # Fully connected layers
    self.fc1 = nn.Linear(64 * 7 * 7, 128) # 64 channels * 7x7 pixels
    self.fc2 = nn.Linear(128, 10) # 10 classes (digits 0-9)
    # Activation and dropout
    self.relu = nn.ReLU()
    self.dropout = nn.Dropout(0.25)
  def forward(self, x):
    # Convolutional layers with pooling
    x = self.pool(self.relu(self.conv1(x))) # 28x28 -> 14x14
    x = self.pool(self.relu(self.conv2(x))) # 14x14 -> 7x7
    # Flatten for fully connected layers
    x = x.view(-1, 64 * 7 * 7)
    # Fully connected layers
    x = self.relu(self.fc1(x))
    x = self.dropout(x)
    x = self.fc2(x)
```

```
# Create model
model = CNN()
print(model)

# Count parameters
total_params = sum(p.numel() for p in model.parameters())
trainable_params = sum(p.numel() for p in model.parameters() if p.requires_grad)
print(f'Total parameters: {total_params:,}')
print(f'Trainable parameters: {trainable_params:,}')
```

Training the CNN



```
# Training setup
criterion = nn.CrossEntropyLoss() # For classification
optimizer = optim.Adam(model.parameters(), lr=0.001)
# Training function
def train_model(model, train_loader, criterion, optimizer, num_epochs=5):
  model.train() # Set to training mode
  for epoch in range(num_epochs):
    running_loss = 0.0
    correct = 0
    total = 0
    for batch_idx, (images, labels) in enumerate(train_loader):
       # Forward pass
       outputs = model(images)
       loss = criterion(outputs, labels)
       # Backward pass
       optimizer.zero_grad()
       loss.backward()
       optimizer.step()
       # Statistics
       running_loss += loss.item()
       _, predicted = torch.max(outputs.data, 1)
       total += labels.size(0)
       correct += (predicted == labels).sum().item()
       if batch_idx % 200 == 199: # Print every 200 mini-batches
         print(f'Epoch [{epoch+1}/{num_epochs}], '
             f'Step [{batch_idx+1}/{len(train_loader)}], '
```

```
f'Loss: {running_loss/200:.4f}')
running_loss = 0.0

# Print epoch results
accuracy = 100 * correct / total
print(f'Epoch [{epoch+1}/{num_epochs}] - Accuracy: {accuracy:.2f}%')

# Train the model
train_model(model, train_loader, criterion, optimizer, num_epochs=5)
```

Evaluate the Model

python	

```
def evaluate_model(model, test_loader):
  model.eval() # Set to evaluation mode
  correct = 0
  total = 0
  class_correct = list(0. for i in range(10))
  class_total = list(0. for i in range(10))
  with torch.no_grad():
    for images, labels in test_loader:
       outputs = model(images)
       _, predicted = torch.max(outputs, 1)
       total += labels.size(0)
       correct += (predicted == labels).sum().item()
       # Per-class accuracy
       c = (predicted == labels).squeeze()
       for i in range(labels.size(0)):
          label = labels[i]
          class_correct[label] += c[i].item()
          class_total[label] += 1
  # Overall accuracy
  accuracy = 100 * correct / total
  print(f'Overall Test Accuracy: {accuracy:.2f}%')
  # Per-class accuracy
  for i in range(10):
    if class_total[i] > 0:
       class_acc = 100 * class_correct[i] / class_total[i]
       print(f'Accuracy of digit {i}: {class_acc:.2f}%')
```

```
# Evaluate the model
evaluate_model(model, test_loader)
```

Visualize Predictions

```
python
def visualize_predictions(model, test_loader, num_images=8):
  model.eval()
  # Get one batch of test data
  dataiter = iter(test_loader)
  images, labels = next(dataiter)
  # Make predictions
  with torch.no_grad():
    outputs = model(images)
     _, predicted = torch.max(outputs, 1)
  # Plot images with predictions
  fig, axes = plt.subplots(2, 4, figsize=(12, 6))
  for i in range(num_images):
    row, col = i // 4, i \% 4
    axes[row, col].imshow(images[i].squeeze(), cmap='gray')
     # Color: green if correct, red if wrong
     color = 'green' if predicted[i] == labels[i] else 'red'
```