**What are Loops?**

In our everyday lives, we tend to repeat a lot of processes without noticing.

For instance, if we want to cook a delicious recipe, we might have to prepare our ingredients by chopping them up. We chop and chop and chop until all of our ingredients are the right size. At this point, we stop chopping.

If we break down our chopping task into a series of three smaller steps, we have:

1. An initialization: We’re ready to cook and have a collection of ingredients we want to chop. We will start at the first ingredient.
2. A repetition: We’re chopping away. We are performing the action of chopping over and over on each of our ingredients, one ingredient at a time.
3. An end condition: We see that we have run out of ingredients to chop and so we stop.

In programming, this process of using an initialization, repetitions, and an ending condition is called a [*loop*](https://www.codecademy.com/resources/docs/python/loops?page_ref=catalog). In a loop, we perform a process of *iteration* (repeating tasks).

Programming languages like Python implement two types of iteration:

1. *Indefinite iteration*, where the number of times the loop is executed depends on how many times a condition is met.
2. *Definite iteration*, where the number of times the loop will be executed is defined in advance (usually based on the collection size).

Typically we will find loops being used to iterate a collection of items. In the above example, we can think of our ingredients we want to chop as our collection. This is a form of definite iteration since we know how long our collection is in advance and thus know how many times we need to iterate over the collection of ingredients.

Some collections might be small — like a short string, while other collections might be massive like a range of numbers from 1 to 10,000,000! But don’t worry, loops give us the ability to masterfully handle both ends of the spectrum. This simple, but powerful, concept saves us a lot of time and makes it easier for us to work with large amounts of data.

In this lesson, we’ll learn how to use Python to implement both definite and indefinite iteration in our own programs.

**Loops**

**While Loops**

In Python, a while loop will repeatedly execute a code block as long as a condition evaluates to True.

The condition of a while loop is always checked first before the block of code runs. If the condition is not met initially, then the code block will never run.

while condition:

# Code inside

This loop will only run 1 time:

hungry = True

while hungry:

print("Time to eat!")

hungry = False

This loop will run 5 times:

i = 1

while i < 6:

print(i)

i = i + 1

**For Loop**

Python for loops can be used to iterate over and perform an action one time for each element in a list.

Proper for loop syntax assigns a temporary value, the current item of the list, to a variable on each successive iteration:

for <temporary value> in <a list>:

for loop bodies must be indented to avoid an IndentationError.

dog\_breeds = ["boxer", "bulldog", "shiba inu"]

# Print each breed:

for breed in dog\_breeds:

print(breed)

**Nested Loops**

In Python, loops can be nested inside other loops. Nested loops can be used to access items of lists which are inside other lists. The item selected from the outer loop can be used as the list for the inner loop to iterate over.

groups = [["Jobs", "Gates"], ["Newton", "Euclid"], ["Einstein", "Feynman"]]

# This outer loop will iterate over each list in the groups list

for group in groups:

# This inner loop will go through each name in each list

for name in group:

print(name)

**Break Keyword**

In a loop, the break keyword escapes the loop, regardless of the iteration number. Once break executes, the program will continue to execute after the loop.

numbers = [0, 254, 2, -1, 3]

for num in numbers:

if (num < 0):

print("Negative number detected!")

break

print(num)

In this example, the output would be:

0

254

2

Negative number detected!

**Continue Keyword**

In Python, the continue keyword is used inside a loop to skip the remaining code inside the loop code block and begin the next loop iteration.

big\_number\_list = [1, 2, -1, 4, -5, 5, 2, -9]

# Print only positive numbers:

for i in big\_number\_list:

if i < 0:

continue

print(i)

**Why Loops?**

Before we get to writing our own loops, let’s explore what programming would be like if we couldn’t use loops.

Let’s say we have a list of ingredients and we want to print every element in the list:

ingredients = ["milk", "sugar", "vanilla extract", "dough", "chocolate"]

If we only use print(), our program might look like this:

print(ingredients[0])  
print(ingredients[1])  
print(ingredients[2])  
print(ingredients[3])  
print(ingredients[4])

The output would be:

milk  
sugar  
vanilla extract  
dough  
chocolate

That’s still manageable, We’re writing 5 print() statements (or copying and pasting a few times). Now imagine if we come back to this program and our list had 10, or 24601, or … 100,000,000 elements? It would take an extremely long time and by the end, we could still end up with inconsistencies and mistakes.

Don’t dwell too long on this tedious scenario — we’ll learn how loops can help us out in the next exercise. For now, let’s gain an appreciation for loops.

**For Loops: Introduction**

Now that we can appreciate what loops do for us, let’s start with your first type of loop, a for loop, a type of definite iteration.

In a for loop, we will know in advance how many times the loop will need to iterate because we will be working on a collection with a predefined length. In our examples, we will be using Python lists as our collection of elements.

With for loops, on each iteration, we will be able to perform an action on each element of the collection.

Before we work with any collection, let’s examine the general structure of a for loop:

for <temporary variable> in <collection>:  
  <action>

Let’s break down each of these components:

1. A for keyword indicates the start of a for loop.
2. A <temporary variable> that is used to represent the value of the element in the collection the loop is currently on.
3. An in keyword separates the temporary variable from the collection used for iteration.
4. A <collection> to loop over. In our examples, we will be using a list.
5. An <action> to do anything on each iteration of the loop.

Let’s link these concepts back to our ingredients example. This for loop prints each ingredient in ingredients:

ingredients = ["milk", "sugar", "vanilla extract", "dough", "chocolate"]  
   
for ingredient in ingredients:  
  print(ingredient)

In this example:

1. ingredient is the <temporary variable>.
2. ingredients is our <collection>.
3. print(ingredient) was the <action> performed on every iteration using the temporary variable of ingredient.

This code outputs:

milk  
sugar  
vanilla extract  
dough  
chocolate

Some things to note about for loops:

* **Temporary Variables:**

A temporary variable’s name is arbitrary and does not need to be defined beforehand. Both of the following code snippets do the exact same thing as our above example:

for i in ingredients:  
  print(i)

for item in ingredients:  
 print(item)

Programming best practices suggest we make our temporary variables as descriptive as possible. Since each iteration (step) of our loop is accessing an ingredient it makes more sense to call our temporary variable ingredient rather than i or item.

* **Indentation:**

Notice that in all of these examples the print statement is indented. Everything at the same level of indentation after the for loop declaration is included in the loop body and is run on every iteration of the loop.

for ingredient in ingredients:  
  # Any code at this level of indentation   
  # will run on each iteration of the loop  
  print(ingredient)

If we ever forget to indent, we’ll get an IndentationError or unexpected behavior.

* **Elegant loops:**

Python loves to help us write elegant code so it allows us to write simple for loops in one-line. In order to see the below example as one line, you may need to expand your narrative window. Here is the previous example in a single line:

for ingredient in ingredients: print(ingredient)

**Note**: One-line for loops are useful for simple programs. It is not recommended you write one-line loops for any loop that has to perform multiple complex actions on each iteration. Doing so will hurt the readability of your code and may ultimately lead to buggier code.

**For Loops: Using Range**

Often we won’t be iterating through a specific list (or any collection), but rather only want to perform a certain action multiple times.

For example, if we wanted to print out a "Learning Loops!" message six times using a for loop, we would follow this structure:

for <temporary variable> in <list of length 6>:

print("Learning Loops!")

Notice that we need to iterate through a list with a length of six, but we don’t necessarily care what is inside of the list.

To create arbitrary collections of any length, we can pair our for loops with the trusty [Python built-in function range()](https://www.codecademy.com/resources/docs/python/built-in-functions/range?page_ref=catalog).

An example of how the range() function works, this code generates a collection of 6 integer elements from 0 to 5:

six\_steps = range(6)  
   
# six\_steps is now a collection with 6 elements:  
# 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

We can then use the range directly in our for loops as the collection to perform a six-step iteration:

for temp in range(6):  
  print("Learning Loops!")

Would output:

Learning Loops!  
Learning Loops!  
Learning Loops!  
Learning Loops!  
Learning Loops!  
Learning Loops!

Something to note is we are not using temp anywhere inside of the loop body. If we are curious about which loop iteration (step) we are on, we can use temp to track it. Since our range starts at 0, we will add + 1 to our temp to represent how many iterations (steps) our loop takes more accurately.

for temp in range(6):  
  print("Loop is on iteration number " + str(temp + 1))

Would output:

Loop is on iteration number 1  
Loop is on iteration number 2  
Loop is on iteration number 3  
Loop is on iteration number 4  
Loop is on iteration number 5  
Loop is on iteration number 6

**While Loops: Introduction**

In Python, for loops are not the only type of loops we can use. Another type of loop is called a while loop and is a form of indefinite iteration.

A while loop performs a set of instructions as long as a given condition is true.

The structure follows this pattern:

while <conditional statement>:  
  <action>

Let’s examine this example, where we print the integers 0 through 3:

count = 0  
while count <= 3:  
  # Loop Body  
  print(count)  
  count += 1

Let’s break the loop down:

1. count is initially defined with the value of 0. The conditional statement in the while loop is count <= 3, which is true at the initial iteration of the loop, so the loop body executes.

Inside the loop body, count is printed and then incremented by 1.

1. When the first iteration of the loop has finished, Python returns to the top of the loop and checks the conditional again. After the first iteration, count would be equal to 1 so the conditional still evaluates to True and so the loop continues.
2. This continues until the count variable becomes 4. At that point, when the conditional is tested it will no longer be True and the loop will stop.

The output would be:

0  
1  
2  
3

Note the following about while loops before we write our own:

* **Indentation:**

Notice that in our example the code under the loop declaration is indented. Similar to a for loop, everything at the same level of indentation after the while loop declaration is run on every iteration of the loop while the condition is true.

while count <= 3:  
  # Loop Body  
  print(count)  
  count += 1  
  # Any other code at this level of indentation will  
  # run on each iteration

If we ever forget to indent, we’ll get an IndentationError or unexpected behavior.

* **Elegant loops:**

Similar to for loops, Python allows us to write elegant one-line while loops. Here is our previous example in a single line:

count = 0  
while count <= 3: print(count); count += 1

**Note**: Here we separate each statement with a ; to denote a separate line of code.

**While Loops: Lists**

A while loop isn’t only good for counting! Similar to how we saw for loops working with lists, we can use while loops to iterate through a [list](https://www.codecademy.com/resources/docs/python/lists?page_ref=catalog) as well.

Let’s return to our ingredient list:

ingredients = ["milk", "sugar", "vanilla extract", "dough", "chocolate"]

We know that while loops require some form of a variable to track the condition of the loop to start and stop.

Take some time to think about what we would use to track whether we need to start/stop the loop if we want to iterate through ingredients and print every element.

Click here to find out!

We know that a list has a predetermined length. If we use the length of the list as the basis for how long our while loop needs to run, we can iterate the exact length of the list.

We can use the [built-in Python len() function](https://www.codecademy.com/resources/docs/python/built-in-functions/len?page_ref=catalog) to accomplish this:

# Length would be equal to 5  
length = len(ingredients)

We can then use this length in addition to another variable to construct the while loop:

length = len(ingredients)  
index = 0  
   
while index < length:  
  print(ingredients[index])  
  index += 1

Let’s break this down:

# Length will be 5 in this case  
length = len(ingredients)

Explanation

As mentioned, we need a way to know how many times we need our loop to iterate based on the size of the collection.  
  
This comes in the form of our length variable which stores the value of the length of the list.

# Index starts at zero  
index = 0

Explanation

We still need an additional variable that will be used to compare against our length.

while index < length:

Explanation

In our while loop conditional, we will compare the index variable to the length of our list stored inside of the length variable.

On the first iteration, we will be comparing the equivalent of 0 < 5 which will evaluate to True, and start the execution of our loop body.

# The first iteration will print ingredients[0]  
print(ingredients[index])

Explanation

Inside of our loop body, we can use the index variable to access our ingredients list and print the value at the current iteration.  
  
Since our index starts at zero, our first iteration will print the value of the element at the zeroth index of our ingredients list, then the next iteration will print the value of the element at the first index, and so on.

# Increment index to access the next element in ingredients  
# Each iteration gets closer to making the conditional no longer true  
index += 1

Explanation

On each iteration of our while loop, we need to also increment the value of index to make sure our loop can stop once the index value is no longer smaller than the length value.  
  
This increment also helps us access the next value of the ingredients list on the next iteration.

Our final output would be:

milk  
sugar  
vanilla extract  
dough  
chocolate

**Infinite Loops**

We’ve iterated through lists that have a discrete beginning and end. However, let’s consider this example:

my\_favorite\_numbers = [4, 8, 15, 16, 42]  
   
for number in my\_favorite\_numbers:  
  my\_favorite\_numbers.append(1)

Take some time to ponder what happens with this code.

Click to see what would happen!

Every time we enter the loop, we add a 1 to the end of the list that we are iterating through. As a result, we never make it to the end of the list. It keeps growing forever!

A loop that never terminates is called an *infinite loop*. These are very dangerous for our code because they will make our program run forever and thus consume all of your computer’s resources.

A program that hits an infinite loop often becomes completely unusable. The best course of action is to avoid writing an infinite loop.

**Note**: If you accidentally stumble into an infinite loop while developing on your own machine, you can end the loop by using control + c to terminate the program. If you’re writing code in our online editor, you’ll need to **refresh the page** to get out of an infinite loop.

**Loop Control: Break**

Loops in Python are very versatile. Python provides a set of control statements that we can use to get even more control out of our loops.

Let’s take a look at a common scenario that we may encounter to see a use case for *loop control statements*.

Take the following list items\_on\_sale as our example:

items\_on\_sale = ["blue shirt", "striped socks", "knit dress", "red headband", "dinosaur onesie"]

It’s often the case that we want to search a list to check if a specific value exists. What does our loop look like if we want to search for the value of "knit dress" and print out "Found it" if it did exist?

It would look something like this:

for item in items\_on\_sale:  
  if item == "knit dress":  
    print("Found it")

This code goes through each item in items\_on\_sale and checks for a match. This is all fine and dandy but what’s the downside?

Once "knit\_dress" is found in the list items\_on\_sale, we don’t need to go through the rest of the items\_on\_sale list. Unfortunately, our loop will keep running until we reach the end of the list.

Since it’s only 5 elements long, iterating through the entire list is not a big deal in this case but what if items\_on\_sale had 1000 items? What if it had 100,000 items? This would be a huge waste of time for our program!

Thankfully you can stop iteration from inside the loop by using break loop control statement.

When the program hits a break statement it immediately terminates a loop. For example:

items\_on\_sale = ["blue shirt", "striped socks", "knit dress", "red headband", "dinosaur onesie"]  
   
print("Checking the sale list!")  
   
for item in items\_on\_sale:  
  print(item)  
  if item == "knit dress":  
    break  
   
print("End of search!")

This would produce the output:

Checking the sale list!  
blue shirt  
striped socks  
knit dress  
End of search!

When the loop entered the if statement and saw the break it immediately ended the loop. We didn’t need to check the elements of "red headband" or "dinosaur onesie" at all.

**Loop Control: Continue**

While the break control statement will come in handy, there are other situations where we don’t want to end the loop entirely. What if we only want to skip the current iteration of the loop?

Let’s take this list of integers as our example:

big\_number\_list = [1, 2, -1, 4, -5, 5, 2, -9]

What if we want to print out all of the numbers in a list, but only if they are positive integers. We can use another common loop control statement called continue.

for i in big\_number\_list:  
  if i <= 0:  
    continue  
  print(i)

This would produce the output:

1  
2  
4  
5  
2

Notice a few things:

1. Similar to when we were using the break control statement, our continue control statement is usually paired with some form of a conditional (if/elif/else).
2. When our loop first encountered an element (-1) that met the conditions of the if statement, it checked the code inside the block and saw the continue. When the loop then encounters a continue statement it immediately skips the current iteration and moves onto the next element in the list (4).
3. The output of the list only printed positive integers in the list because every time our loop entered the if statement and saw the continue statement it simply moved to the next iteration of the list and thus never reached the print statement.

**Nested Loops**

Loops can be nested in Python, as they can with other programming languages. We will find certain situations that require nested loops.

Suppose we are in charge of a science class, that is split into three project teams:

project\_teams = [["Ava", "Samantha", "James"], ["Lucille", "Zed"], ["Edgar", "Gabriel"]]

Using a for or while loop can be useful here to get each team:

for team in project\_teams:  
  print(team)

Would output:

["Ava", "Samantha", "James"]  
["Lucille", "Zed"]  
["Edgar", "Gabriel"]

But what if we wanted to print each individual student? In this case, we would actually need to *nest* our loops to be able to loop through each sub-list. Here is what it would look like:

# Loop through each sublist  
for team in project\_teams:  
  # Loop elements in each sublist  
  for student in team:  
    print(student)

This would output:

Ava  
Samantha  
James  
Lucille  
Zed  
Edgar  
Gabriel

**List Comprehensions: Introduction**

So far we have seen many of the ideas about using loops in our code. Python prides itself on allowing programmers to write clean and elegant code. We have already seen this with Python giving us the ability to write while and for loops in a single line.

In this exercise, we are going to examine another way we can write elegant loops in our programs using *list comprehensions*.

To start, let’s say we had a list of integers and wanted to create a list where each element is doubled. We could accomplish this using a for loop and a new list called doubled:

numbers = [2, -1, 79, 33, -45]  
doubled = []  
   
for number in numbers:  
  doubled.append(number \* 2)  
   
print(doubled)

Would output:

[4, -2, 158, 66, -90]

Let’s see how we can use the power of list comprehensions to solve these types of problems in one line. Here is our same problem but now written as a list comprehension:

numbers = [2, -1, 79, 33, -45]  
doubled = [num \* 2 for num in numbers]  
print(doubled)

Let’s break down our example in a more general way:

new\_list = [<expression> for <element> in <collection>]

In our doubled example, our list comprehension:

1. Takes an element in the list numbers
2. Assigns that element to a variable called num (our <element>)
3. Applies the <expression> on the element stored in num and adds the result to a new list called doubled
4. Repeats steps 1-3 for every other element in the numbers list (our <collection>)

Our result would be the same:

[4, -2, 158, 66, -90]

**List Comprehensions: Conditionals**

List Comprehensions are very flexible. We even can expand our examples to incorporate conditional logic.

Suppose we wanted to double only our negative numbers from our previous numbers list.

We will start by using a for loop and a list only\_negative\_doubled:

numbers = [2, -1, 79, 33, -45]  
only\_negative\_doubled = []  
   
for num in numbers:  
  if num < 0:   
    only\_negative\_doubled.append(num \* 2)  
   
print(only\_negative\_doubled)

Would output:

[-2, -90]

Now, here is what our code would look like using a list comprehension:

numbers = [2, -1, 79, 33, -45]  
negative\_doubled = [num \* 2 for num in numbers if num < 0]  
print(negative\_doubled)

Would output the same result:

[-2, -90]

In our negative\_doubled example, our list comprehension:

1. Takes an element in the list numbers.
2. Assigns that element to a variable called num.
3. Checks if the condition num < 0 is met by the element stored in num. If so, it goes to step 4, otherwise it skips it and goes to the next element in the list.
4. Applies the expression num \* 2 on the element stored in num and adds the result to a new list called negative\_doubled
5. Repeats steps 1-3 (and sometimes 4) for each remaining element in the numbers list.

We can also use If-Else conditions directly in our comprehensions. For example, let’s say we wanted to double every negative number but triple all positive numbers. Here is what our code might look like:

numbers = [2, -1, 79, 33, -45]  
doubled = [num \* 2 if num < 0 else num \* 3 for num in numbers ]  
print(doubled)

Would output:

[6, -2, 237, 99, -90]

**NOTE**: This is a bit different than our previous comprehension since the conditional if num < 0 else num \* 3 comes after the expression num \* 2 but before our for keyword. The placement of the conditional expression within the comprehension is dependent on whether or not an else clause is used. When an if statement is used without else, the conditional must go after for <element> in <collection>. If the conditional expression includes an else clause, the conditional must go before for. Attempting to write the expressions in any other order will result in a SyntaxError.

Here are a few list comprehensions in a single block. Take a moment to compare how the syntax must change depending on whether or not an else clause is included:

numbers = [2, -1, 79, 33, -45]  
   
no\_if   = [num \* 2 for num in numbers]  
if\_only = [num \* 2 for num in numbers if num < 0]  
if\_else = [num \* 2 if num < 0 else num \* 3 for num in numbers]

**Review**

Good job! In this lesson, you learned

* How to write a for loop.
* How to use range in a loop.
* How to write a while loop.
* What infinite loops are and how to avoid them.
* How to control loops using break and continue.
* How to write elegant loops as list comprehensions.