User Defined Types

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Overview

1. User defined types
   - Why define new types?
   - Classes
   - Objects
   - Methods, Fields
   - Special methods. Overloading
2. Python scope and namespace
   - Class vs instance attributes
3. Principles when defining new data types

Week 7 Test

- There will be a test during you laboratory activity
- You will receive a problem statement not dissimilar to Assignment3-4 (no classes!)
- You will have to implement it within 80 minutes, the rest is reserved for grading
- The test is 20% of your laboratory grade and cannot be retaken at a later date
- Assignment5-7, iteration 2 is postponed to week 8!

User defined types

NB!

Types classify values. A type denotes a **domain** (a set of values) and **operations** on those values.

User defined types

- **Object oriented programming** - a programming paradigm that uses objects that have data and which "talk" to each other to design applications.

Why define new types?

Let's review the modular calculator example:

1. Issues with the global variables version:
   - You can easily break global vars!
   - They make testing difficult
   - The relation between them is difficult
2. Issues with the no-global variables version:
   - The state of the calculator is exposed to the world
   - The state has to be transmitted as parameter to every function

User defined types - classes

Class - a construct used as a template to create instances of itself - referred to as class instances, class objects, instance objects or simply **objects**. A class defines constituent members which enable these class instances to have *state* and behaviour.

Classes in Python

- Defined using the keyword **class** (as in many other languages)
- The class definition is an executable statement.
- The statements inside a class definition are usually function definitions, but other statements are allowed
- When a class definition is entered, a new namespace is created, and used as the local scope - thus, all assignments to local variables go into this new namespace. In particular, function definitions bind the name of the new function here.

User defined types - objects

Object - in object-oriented programming, an object refers to a particular instance of a class, and is a combination of variables, functions and other data structures. Objects support two kinds of operations: **attribute (data or method) references** and **instantiation**.

User defined types - objects

1. Object instantiation - uses the reserved function notation of **__init__**
   - The instantiation operation creates an empty object that is of the type of the given class
   - A class may define a special method named __init__, used to create an instance of that class (e.g. class $->$ object)
   - In Python, use self to refer to that instance

User defined types - objects

2. Attribute references (method or field)
   - Uses the "dot-notation", not dissimilar to package.module names.
   - We have instance variables/methods and class variables/methods
   - Instance variables are specific to an object (each object has its own instance)
   - Class variables are specific to a class (they are shared by all instances of that class)
   - The variable referencing the object specifies on which instance the call is made, in the case of instance variables

Existing data types

ex14_existingDataTypes.py

Fields, Methods

- Fields
  - Variables that store data specific to an instance or a class (see the slide above)
  - Can be objects themselves
  - They come into existence first time they are assigned to
- Methods
  - Functions in a class that can access values from a specific instance.
  - In Python the method will automatically receive a first argument: the current instance
  - All instance methods need to have the **self** argument

Fields, Methods

Demo

A first example using classes in Python - **ex15_pythonClassParticularities.py**

Demo

Let's create a new data type - RationalNumber. (Source code is in **ex16_rationalNumberBasic.py**)

Special methods

- **__str__** - converts the current object into a string type (good for printing)
- **__eq__** - test (logical) equality of two objects
- **__ne__** - test (logical) inequality of two objects
- **__lt__** - test $x < y$
- Many others at[1]

[1] https://docs.python.org/3/reference/datamodel.html

Special methods - operator overloading

- **__add__(self, other)** - to be able to use "+" operator
- **__mul__(self, other)** - to be able to use the "*" operator
- **__setItem__(self,index, value)** - to make a class behave like an array/dictionary, use the "[]"
- **__getItem__(self, index)** - to make a class behave like an array
- **__len__(self)** - overload len
- **__getslice__(self,low,high)** - overload slicing operator
- **__call__(self, arg)** - to make a class behave like a function, use the "()"

Special methods - example

Demo

We should make our rational number type a bit more useful. (Source code is in **ex17_rationalNumberOperators.py**)

Python scope and namespace

NB!

- A *namespace* is a mapping from names to objects.
- Namespaces are implemented as Python dictionaries
  - Key: name
  - Value - Object
- Remember **globals()** and **locals()** ?

Python scope and namespace

- A class introduces a new namespace
- Methods and fields of a class are in a separate namespace (the namespace of the class)
- All the rules (bound a name, scope/visibility, formal/actual parameters, etc.) related to the names (function, variable) are the same for class attributes (methods, fields). Keep in mind that the class has its own namespace

Class vs instance attributes

- Instance attributes
  - The **self** reference decides for what object the attribute is accessed
  - Each instance has its own set of fields
- Class attributes
  - Attributes that are unique to the class
  - They are shared by all instances of the same class
  - In most languages, they are reffered to as "static" fields, or methods
  - In Python, the **@staticmethod** decorator is used
  - Static methods do not receive the **self** reference

Class vs instance attributes

Demo

ex18_instanceVsClassAttributes.py)

Class vs instance attributes

Discussion

Can you think of examples where class attributes are more suitable rather than instance attributes?

Encapsulation

- A set of rules or guidelines that you will use when deciding on the implementation of new data types
- What we will cover
  - Encapsulation
  - Information hiding
  - Abstract data types

Encapsulation

- The **state** of the object is the data that represents it (in most cases, the class fields)
- The **behaviour** is represented by the class methods
- Encapsulation means that **state** and **behaviour** are kept together, in one **cohesive** unit

Information hiding

- The internal representation of an object needs to be hidden from view outside of the object's definition
- Hiding the internals of the object protects its integrity by preventing users from setting the internal data of the component into an invalid or inconsistent state
- Divide the code into a public interface, and a private implementation of that interface

Information hiding

- Defining a specific interface and isolate the internals to keep other modules from doing anything incorrect to your data
- Limit the functions that are visible (part of the interface),so you are free to change the internal data without breaking the client code
- Write to the Interface, not the the Implementation
- If you are using only the public functions you can change large parts of your classes without affecting the rest of the program

Information hiding

Public and private members - data hiding in Python

- We need to protect (hide) the internal representation (the implementation)
- Provide accessors (getter) to the data
- Encapsulations is particularly important when the class is used by others

Information hiding

Public and private members - data hiding in Python

- Nothing in Python makes it possible to enforce data hiding - it is all based upon convention. use the convention: _name or __name for fields, methods that are " private"
- A name prefixed with an underscore (e.g. _spam) should be treated as a non-public part of the API (whether it is a function, a method or a data member). It should be considered an implementation detail and subject to change without notice.
- A name prefixed with two underscores (e.g. __spam) is private and name mangling (its actual name is replaced by the Python runtime) is employed

Guidelines

- Upper application layers does not have to know about implementation details of the methods or the internal data representation used by the code they call
- Code must work even when the implementation or data representation are changed
- Function and class specification have to be independent of the data representation and the method's implementation **(Data Abstraction)**

Abstract data types

- Operations are specified independently of their implementation
- Operations are specified independently of the data representation
- Abstract data type is a Data type + Data Abstraction + Data Encapsulation