

Python for Everybody

Exploring Data Using Python 3

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Credits

Editorial Support: Elliott Hauser, Sue Blumenberg

Cover Design: Aimee Andrion

Printing History

- 2024-Jan-01 Update examples to Python 3.12, remove references to Twitter APIs, rewrite Databases chapter
- 2023-Jun-29 Many errata included, switch from Google APIs to OpenStreetMap APIs
- 2016-Jul-05 First Complete Python 3.0 version
- 2015-Dec-20 Initial Python 3.0 rough conversion

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Preface

Remixing an Open Book

It is quite natural for academics who are continuously told to “publish or perish” to want to always create something from scratch that is their own fresh creation. This book is an experiment in not starting from scratch, but instead “remixing” the book titled *Think Python: How to Think Like a Computer Scientist* written by Allen B. Downey, Jeff Elkner, and others.

In December of 2009, I was preparing to teach *SI502 - Networked Programming* at the University of Michigan for the fifth semester in a row and decided it was time to write a Python textbook that focused on exploring data instead of understanding algorithms and abstractions. My goal in SI502 is to teach people lifelong data handling skills using Python. Few of my students were planning to be professional computer programmers. Instead, they planned to be librarians, managers, lawyers, biologists, economists, etc., who happened to want to skillfully use technology in their chosen field.

I never seemed to find the perfect data-oriented Python book for my course, so I set out to write just such a book. Luckily at a faculty meeting three weeks before I was about to start my new book from scratch over the holiday break, Dr. Atul Prakash showed me the *Think Python* book which he had used to teach his Python course that semester. It is a well-written Computer Science text with a focus on short, direct explanations and ease of learning.

The overall book structure has been changed to get to doing data analysis problems as quickly as possible and have a series of running examples and exercises about data analysis from the very beginning.

Chapters 2–10 are similar to the *Think Python* book, but there have been major changes. Number-oriented examples and exercises have been replaced with data-oriented exercises. Topics are presented in the order needed to build increasingly sophisticated data analysis solutions. Some topics like `try` and `except` are pulled forward and presented as part of the chapter on conditionals. Functions are given very light treatment until they are needed to handle program complexity rather than introduced as an early lesson in abstraction. Nearly all user-defined functions have been removed from the example code and exercises outside of Chapter 4. The word “recursion”¹ does not appear in the book at all.

In chapters 1 and 11–16, all of the material is brand new, focusing on real-world uses and simple examples of Python for data analysis including regular expressions for searching and parsing, automating tasks on your computer, retrieving data across the network, scraping web pages for data, object-oriented programming, using web services, parsing XML and JSON data, creating and using databases using Structured Query Language, and visualizing data.

The ultimate goal of all of these changes is to shift from a Computer Science to an Informatics focus and to only include topics into a first technology class that can be useful even if one chooses not to become a professional programmer.

¹Except, of course, for this line.

Students who find this book interesting and want to further explore should look at Allen B. Downey's *Think Python* book. Because there is a lot of overlap between the two books, students will quickly pick up skills in the additional areas of technical programming and algorithmic thinking that are covered in *Think Python*. And given that the books have a similar writing style, they should be able to move quickly through *Think Python* with a minimum of effort.

As the copyright holder of *Think Python*, Allen has given me permission to change the book's license on the material from his book that remains in this book from the GNU Free Documentation License to the more recent Creative Commons Attribution — Share Alike license. This follows a general shift in open documentation licenses moving from the GFDL to the CC-BY-SA (e.g., Wikipedia). Using the CC-BY-SA license maintains the book's strong copyleft tradition while making it even more straightforward for new authors to reuse this material as they see fit.

I feel that this book serves as an example of why open materials are so important to the future of education, and I want to thank Allen B. Downey and Cambridge University Press for their forward-looking decision to make the book available under an open copyright. I hope they are pleased with the results of my efforts and I hope that you, the reader, are pleased with *our* collective efforts.

I would like to thank Allen B. Downey and Lauren Cowles for their help, patience, and guidance in dealing with and resolving the copyright issues around this book.

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September 9, 2013

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Chapter 1

Why should you learn to write programs?

Writing programs (or programming) is a very creative and rewarding activity. You can write programs for many reasons, ranging from making your living to solving a difficult data analysis problem to having fun to helping someone else solve a problem. This book assumes that *everyone* needs to know how to program, and that once you know how to program you will figure out what you want to do with your newfound skills.

We are surrounded in our daily lives with computers ranging from laptops to cell phones. We can think of these computers as our “personal assistants” who can take care of many things on our behalf. The hardware in our current-day computers is essentially built to continuously ask us the question, “What would you like me to do next?”

Programmers add an operating system and a set of applications to the hardware and we end up with a Personal Digital Assistant that is quite helpful and capable of helping us do many different things.

Our computers are fast and have vast amounts of memory and could be very helpful to us if we only knew the language to speak to explain to the computer what we would like it to “do next”. If we knew this language, we could tell the computer to do tasks on our behalf that were repetitive. Interestingly, the kinds of things computers can do best are often the kinds of things that we humans find boring and mind-numbing.

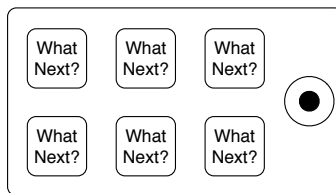


Figure 1.1: Personal Digital Assistant

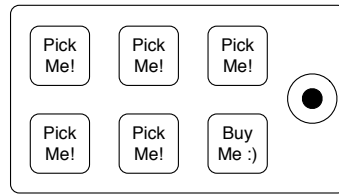


Figure 1.2: Programmers Talking to You

For example, look at the first three paragraphs of this chapter and tell me the most commonly used word and how many times the word is used. While you were able to read and understand the words in a few seconds, counting them is almost painful because it is not the kind of problem that human minds are designed to solve. For a computer, the opposite is true, reading and understanding text from a piece of paper is hard for a computer to do but counting the words and telling you how many times the most used word was used is very easy for the computer:

```
python words.py
Enter file: words.txt
to 16
```

Our “personal information analysis assistant” quickly told us that the word “to” was used sixteen times in the first three paragraphs of this chapter.

This very fact that computers are good at things that humans are not is why you need to become skilled at talking “computer language”. Once you learn this new language, you can delegate mundane tasks to your partner (the computer), leaving more time for you to do the things that you are uniquely suited for. You bring creativity, intuition, and inventiveness to this partnership.

1.1 Creativity and motivation

While this book is not intended for professional programmers, professional programming can be a very rewarding job both financially and personally. Building useful, elegant, and clever programs for others to use is a very creative activity. Your computer or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) usually contains many different programs from many different groups of programmers, each competing for your attention and interest. They try their best to meet your needs and give you a great user experience in the process. In some situations, when you choose a piece of software, the programmers are directly compensated because of your choice.

If we think of programs as the creative output of groups of programmers, perhaps the following figure is a more sensible version of our PDA:

For now, our primary motivation is not to make money or please end users, but instead for us to be more productive in handling the data and information that we will encounter in our lives. When you first start, you will be both the programmer and the end user of your programs. As you gain skill as a programmer and programming feels more creative to you, your thoughts may turn toward developing programs for others.

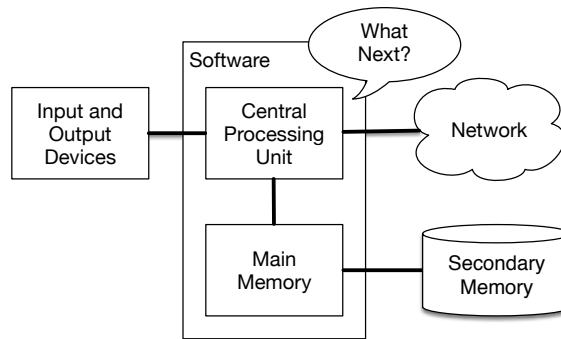


Figure 1.3: Hardware Architecture

1.2 Computer hardware architecture

Before we start learning the language we speak to give instructions to computers to develop software, we need to learn a small amount about how computers are built. If you were to take apart your computer or cell phone and look deep inside, you would find the following parts:

The high-level definitions of these parts are as follows:

- The *Central Processing Unit* (or CPU) is the part of the computer that is built to be obsessed with “what is next?” If your computer is rated at 3.0 Gigahertz, it means that the CPU will ask “What next?” three billion times per second. You are going to have to learn how to talk fast to keep up with the CPU.
- The *Main Memory* is used to store information that the CPU needs in a hurry. The main memory is nearly as fast as the CPU. But the information stored in the main memory vanishes when the computer is turned off.
- The *Secondary Memory* is also used to store information, but it is much slower than the main memory. The advantage of the secondary memory is that it can store information even when there is no power to the computer. Examples of secondary memory are disk drives or flash memory (typically found in USB sticks and portable music players).
- The *Input and Output Devices* are simply our screen, keyboard, mouse, microphone, speaker, touchpad, etc. They are all of the ways we interact with the computer.
- These days, most computers also have a *Network Connection* to retrieve information over a network. We can think of the network as a very slow place to store and retrieve data that might not always be “up”. So in a sense, the network is a slower and at times unreliable form of *Secondary Memory*.

While most of the detail of how these components work is best left to computer builders, it helps to have some terminology so we can talk about these different parts as we write our programs.

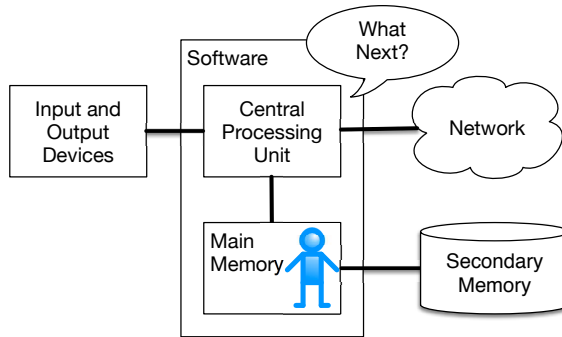


Figure 1.4: Where Are You?

As a programmer, your job is to use and orchestrate each of these resources to solve the problem that you need to solve and analyze the data you get from the solution. As a programmer you will mostly be “talking” to the CPU and telling it what to do next. Sometimes you will tell the CPU to use the main memory, secondary memory, network, or the input/output devices.

You need to be the person who answers the CPU’s “What next?” question. But it would be very uncomfortable to shrink you down to 5mm tall and insert you into the computer just so you could issue a command three billion times per second. So instead, you must write down your instructions in advance. We call these stored instructions a *program* and the act of writing these instructions down and getting the instructions to be correct *programming*.

1.3 Understanding programming

In the rest of this book, we will try to turn you into a person who is skilled in the art of programming. In the end you will be a *programmer* - perhaps not a professional programmer, but at least you will have the skills to look at a data/information analysis problem and develop a program to solve the problem.

In a sense, you need two skills to be a programmer:

- First, you need to know the programming language (Python) - you need to know the vocabulary and the grammar. You need to be able to spell the words in this new language properly and know how to construct well-formed “sentences” in this new language.
- Second, you need to “tell a story”. In writing a story, you combine words and sentences to convey an idea to the reader. There is a skill and art in constructing the story, and skill in story writing is improved by doing some writing and getting some feedback. In programming, our program is the “story” and the problem you are trying to solve is the “idea”.

Once you learn one programming language such as Python, you will find it much easier to learn a second programming language such as JavaScript or C++.

new programming language has very different vocabulary and grammar but the problem-solving skills will be the same across all programming languages.

You will learn the “vocabulary” and “sentences” of Python pretty quickly. It will take longer for you to be able to write a coherent program to solve a brand-new problem. We teach programming much like we teach writing. We start reading and explaining programs, then we write simple programs, and then we write increasingly complex programs over time. At some point you “get your muse” and see the patterns on your own and can see more naturally how to take a problem and write a program that solves that problem. And once you get to that point, programming becomes a very pleasant and creative process.

We start with the vocabulary and structure of Python programs. Be patient as the simple examples remind you of when you started reading for the first time.

1.4 Words and sentences

Unlike human languages, the Python vocabulary is actually pretty small. We call this “vocabulary” the “reserved words” or “keywords”. These are words that have very special meaning to Python. When Python sees these words in a Python program, they have one and only one meaning to Python. Later as you write programs you will make up your own words that have meaning to you called *variables*. You will have great latitude in choosing your names for your variables, but you cannot use any of Python’s reserved words as a name for a variable.

When we train a dog, we use special words like “sit”, “stay”, and “fetch”. When you talk to a dog and don’t use any of the reserved words, they just look at you with a quizzical look on their face until you say a reserved word. For example, if you say, “I wish more people would walk to improve their overall health”, what most dogs likely hear is, “blah blah blah *walk* blah blah blah blah.” That is because “walk” is a reserved word in dog language. Many might suggest that the language between humans and cats has no reserved words¹.

The reserved words in the language where humans talk to Python include the following:

False	await	else	import	pass
None	break	except	in	raise
True	class	finally	is	return
and	continue	for	lambda	try
as	def	from	nonlocal	while
assert	del	global	not	with
async	elif	if	or	yield

That is it, and unlike a dog, Python is already completely trained. When you say “try”, Python will try every time you say it without fail.

We will learn these reserved words and how they are used in good time, but for now we will focus on the Python equivalent of “speak” (in human-to-dog language). The nice thing about telling Python to speak is that we can even tell it what to say by giving it a message in quotes:

¹<http://xkcd.com/231/>

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

And we have even written our first syntactically correct Python sentence. Our sentence starts with the function *print* followed by a string of text of our choosing enclosed in single quotes. The strings in the print statements are enclosed in quotes. Single quotes and double quotes do the same thing; most people use single quotes except in cases like this where a single quote (which is also an apostrophe) appears in the string.

1.5 Conversing with Python

Now that we have a word and a simple sentence that we know in Python, we need to know how to start a conversation with Python to test our new language skills.

Before you can converse with Python, you must first install the Python software on your computer and learn how to start Python on your computer. That is too much detail for this chapter so I suggest that you consult www.py4e.com where I have detailed instructions and screencasts of setting up and starting Python on Macintosh and Windows systems. At some point, you will be in a terminal or command window and you will type *python* and the Python interpreter will start executing in interactive mode and appear somewhat as follows:

```
Python 3.11.6 (main, Nov 2 2023, 04:39:43)
  [Clang 14.0.3 (clang-1403.0.22.14.1)] on darwin
Type "help", "copyright", "credits" or "license" for more
information.
>>>
```

The >>> prompt is the Python interpreter's way of asking you, "What do you want me to do next?" Python is ready to have a conversation with you. All you have to know is how to speak the Python language.

Let's say for example that you did not know even the simplest Python language words or sentences. You might want to use the standard line that astronauts use when they land on a faraway planet and try to speak with the inhabitants of the planet:

```
>>> I come in peace, please take me to your leader
File "<stdin>", line 1
    I come in peace take me tou your leader
    ^^^^^
SyntaxError: invalid syntax
>>>
```

This is not going so well. Unless you think of something quickly, the inhabitants of the planet are likely to stab you with their spears, put you on a spit, roast you over a fire, and eat you for dinner.

Luckily you brought a copy of this book on your travels, and you thumb to this very page and try again:


```
>>> print('Hello world!')
Hello world!
```

This is looking much better, so you try to communicate some more:

```
>>> print('You must be the legendary god that comes from the sky')
You must be the legendary god that comes from the sky
>>> print('We have been waiting for you for a long time')
We have been waiting for you for a long time
>>> print('Our legend says you will be very tasty with mustard')
Our legend says you will be very tasty with mustard
>>> print 'We will have a feast tonight unless you say
      File "<stdin>", line 1
        print 'We will have a feast tonight unless you say
              ^
SyntaxError: unterminated string literal (detected at line 1)
>>>
```

The conversation was going so well for a while and then you made the tiniest mistake using the Python language and Python brought the spears back out.

At this point, you should also realize that while Python is amazingly complex and powerful and very picky about the syntax you use to communicate with it, Python is *not* intelligent. You are really just having a conversation with yourself, but using proper syntax.

In a sense, when you use a program written by someone else the conversation is between you and those other programmers with Python acting as an intermediary. Python is a way for the creators of programs to express how the conversation is supposed to proceed. And in just a few more chapters, you will be one of those programmers using Python to talk to the users of your program.

Before we leave our first conversation with the Python interpreter, you should probably know the proper way to say “good-bye” when interacting with the inhabitants of Planet Python:

```
>>> good-bye
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
NameError: name 'good' is not defined
>>> if you don't mind, I need to leave
      File "<stdin>", line 1
        if you don't mind, I need to leave
              ^
SyntaxError: unterminated string literal (detected at line 1)
>>> quit()
```

You will notice that the error is different for the first two incorrect attempts. The second error is different because *if* is a reserved word and Python saw the reserved word and thought we were trying to say something but got the syntax of the sentence wrong.

The proper way to say “good-bye” to Python is to enter *quit()* at the interactive chevron `>>>` prompt. It would have probably taken you quite a while to guess that one, so having a book handy probably will turn out to be helpful.

1.6 Terminology: Interpreter and compiler

Python is a *high-level* language intended to be relatively straightforward for humans to read and write and for computers to read and process. Other high-level languages include Java, C++, PHP, Ruby, Basic, Perl, JavaScript, and many more. The actual hardware inside the Central Processing Unit (CPU) does not understand any of these high-level languages.

The CPU understands a language we call *machine language*. Machine language is very simple and frankly very tiresome to write because it is represented all in zeros and ones:

```
001010001110100100101010000001111
11100110000011101010010101101101
...
```

Machine language seems quite simple on the surface, given that there are only zeros and ones, but its syntax is even more complex and far more intricate than Python. So very few programmers ever write machine language. Instead we build various translators to allow programmers to write in high-level languages like Python or JavaScript and these translators convert the programs to machine language for actual execution by the CPU.

Since machine language is tied to the computer hardware, machine language is not *portable* across different types of hardware. Programs written in high-level languages can be moved between different computers by using a different interpreter on the new machine or recompiling the code to create a machine language version of the program for the new machine.

These programming language translators fall into two general categories: (1) interpreters and (2) compilers.

An *interpreter* reads the source code of the program as written by the programmer, parses the source code, and interprets the instructions on the fly. Python is an interpreter and when we are running Python interactively, we can type a line of Python (a sentence) and Python processes it immediately and is ready for us to type another line of Python.

Some of the lines of Python tell Python that you want it to remember some value for later. We need to pick a name for that value to be remembered and we can use that symbolic name to retrieve the value later. We use the term *variable* to refer to the labels we use to refer to this stored data.

```
>>> x = 6
>>> print(x)
6
>>> y = x * 7
```

```
>>> print(y)
42
>>>
```

In this example, we ask Python to remember the value six and use the label x so we can retrieve the value later. We verify that Python has actually remembered the value using *print*. Then we ask Python to retrieve x and multiply it by seven and put the newly computed value in y . Then we ask Python to print out the value currently in y .

Even though we are typing these commands into Python one line at a time, Python is treating them as an ordered sequence of statements with later statements able to retrieve data created in earlier statements. We are writing our first simple paragraph with four sentences in a logical and meaningful order.

It is the nature of an *interpreter* to be able to have an interactive conversation as shown above. A *compiler* needs to be handed the entire program in a file, and then it runs a process to translate the high-level source code into machine language and then the compiler puts the resulting machine language into a file for later execution.

If you have a Windows system, often these executable machine language programs have a suffix of “`.exe`” or “`.dll`” which stand for “executable” and “dynamic link library” respectively. In Linux and Macintosh, there is no suffix that uniquely marks a file as executable.

If you were to open an executable file in a text editor, it would look completely crazy and be unreadable:

```
?ELF^A^A^A^@~@~@~@~@~@~@B^C^@~A^@~@~@\xa0\x82
D^H4^@~@~@\x90~]^~@~@~@~@~@~@4^@ ~@G^@~(^\$^@!~^@F^@~
^@~@4^@~@~@4\x80D^H4\x80D^H\xe0~@~@~@\xe0~@~@~@E
^@~@~@D^@~@~@C^@~@~@T^A^@~@~@T\x81D^HT\x81D^HS
^@~@~@S^@~@~@D^@~@~@A^@~@~@A\^DHQVhT\x83D^H\xe8
```

It is not easy to read or write machine language, so it is nice that we have *interpreters* and *compilers* that allow us to write in high-level languages like Python or C.

Now at this point in our discussion of compilers and interpreters, you should be wondering a bit about the Python interpreter itself. What language is it written in? Is it written in a compiled language? When we type “python”, what exactly is happening?

The Python interpreter is written in a high-level language called “C”. You can look at the actual source code for the Python interpreter by going to www.python.org and working your way to their source code. So Python is a program itself and it is compiled into machine code. When you installed Python on your computer (or the vendor installed it), you copied a machine-code copy of the translated Python program onto your system. In Windows, the executable machine code for Python itself is likely in a file with a name like:

C:\Python35\python.exe

That is more than you really need to know to be a Python programmer, but sometimes it pays to answer those little nagging questions right at the beginning.

1.7 Writing a program

Typing commands into the Python interpreter is a great way to experiment with Python’s features, but it is not recommended for solving more complex problems.

When we want to write a program, we use a text editor to write the Python instructions into a file, which is called a *script*. By convention, Python scripts have names that end with `.py`.

To execute the script, you have to tell the Python interpreter the name of the file. In a command window, you would type `python hello.py` as follows:

```
$ cat hello.py
print('Hello world!')
$ python hello.py
Hello world!
```

The “\$” is the operating system prompt, and the “cat hello.py” is showing us that the file “hello.py” has a one-line Python program to print a string.

We call the Python interpreter and tell it to read its source code from the file “hello.py” instead of prompting us for lines of Python code interactively.

You will notice that there was no need to have *quit()* at the end of the Python program in the file. When Python is reading your source code from a file, it knows to stop when it reaches the end of the file.

1.8 What is a program?

The definition of a *program* at its most basic is a sequence of Python statements that have been crafted to do something. Even our simple *hello.py* script is a program. It is a one-line program and is not particularly useful, but in the strictest definition, it is a Python program.

It might be easiest to understand what a program is by thinking about a problem that a program might be built to solve, and then looking at a program that would solve that problem.

Lets say you are doing Social Computing research on Facebook posts and you are interested in the most frequently used word in a series of posts. You could print out the stream of Facebook posts and pore over the text looking for the most common word, but that would take a long time and be very mistake prone. You would be smart to write a Python program to handle the task quickly and accurately so you can spend the weekend doing something fun.

For example, look at the following text about a clown and a car. Look at the text and figure out the most common word and how many times it occurs.

the clown ran after the car and the car ran into the tent
and the tent fell down on the clown and the car

Then imagine that you are doing this task looking at millions of lines of text. Frankly it would be quicker for you to learn Python and write a Python program to count the words than it would be to manually scan the words.

The even better news is that I already came up with a simple program to find the most common word in a text file. I wrote it, tested it, and now I am giving it to you to use so you can save some time.

```
name = input('Enter file: ')
handle = open(name, 'r')
counts = dict()

for line in handle:
    words = line.split()
    for word in words:
        counts[word] = counts.get(word, 0) + 1

bigcount = None
bigword = None
for word, count in list(counts.items()):
    if bigcount is None or count > bigcount:
        bigword = word
        bigcount = count

print(bigword, bigcount)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/words.py
```

You don't even need to know Python to use this program. You will need to get through Chapter 10 of this book to fully understand the awesome Python techniques that were used to make the program. You are the end user, you simply use the program and marvel at its cleverness and how it saved you so much manual effort. You simply type the code into a file called *words.py* and run it or you download the source code from <http://www.py4e.com/code3/> and run it.

This is a good example of how Python and the Python language are acting as an intermediary between you (the end user) and me (the programmer). Python is a way for us to exchange useful instruction sequences (i.e., programs) in a common language that can be used by anyone who installs Python on their computer. So neither of us are talking *to Python*, instead we are communicating with each other *through* Python.

1.9 The building blocks of programs

In the next few chapters, we will learn more about the vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and story structure of Python. We will learn about the

powerful capabilities of Python and how to compose those capabilities together to create useful programs.

There are some low-level conceptual patterns that we use to construct programs. These constructs are not just for Python programs, they are part of every programming language from machine language up to the high-level languages.

input Get data from the “outside world”. This might be reading data from a file, or even some kind of sensor like a microphone or GPS. In our initial programs, our input will come from the user typing data on the keyboard.

output Display the results of the program on a screen or store them in a file or perhaps write them to a device like a speaker to play music or speak text.

sequential execution Perform statements one after another in the order they are encountered in the script.

conditional execution Check for certain conditions and then execute or skip a sequence of statements.

repeated execution Perform some set of statements repeatedly, usually with some variation.

reuse Write a set of instructions once and give them a name and then reuse those instructions as needed throughout your program.

It sounds almost too simple to be true, and of course it is never so simple. It is like saying that walking is simply “putting one foot in front of the other”. The “art” of writing a program is composing and weaving these basic elements together many times over to produce something that is useful to its users.

The word counting program above directly uses all of these patterns except for one.

1.10 What could possibly go wrong?

As we saw in our earliest conversations with Python, we must communicate very precisely when we write Python code. The smallest deviation or mistake will cause Python to give up looking at your program.

Beginning programmers often take the fact that Python leaves no room for errors as evidence that Python is mean, hateful, and cruel. While Python seems to like everyone else, Python knows them personally and holds a grudge against them. Because of this grudge, Python takes our perfectly written programs and rejects them as “unfit” just to torment us.

```
>>> print 'Hello world!'
File "<stdin>", line 1
    print 'Hello world!'
    ~~~~~
```

SyntaxError: invalid syntax

```
>>> print ('Hello world')
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
```

```

NameError: name 'print' is not defined. Did you mean: 'print'?

>>> I hate you Python!
File "<stdin>", line 1
    I hate you Python!
    ~~~~

SyntaxError: invalid syntax
>>> if you come out of there, I would teach you a lesson
File "<stdin>", line 1
    if you come out of there, I would teach you a lesson
    ~~~~

SyntaxError: invalid syntax
>>>

```

There is little to be gained by arguing with Python. It is just a tool. It has no emotions and it is happy and ready to serve you whenever you need it. Its error messages sound harsh, but they are just Python's call for help. It has looked at what you typed, and it simply cannot understand what you have entered.

Python is much more like a dog, loving you unconditionally, having a few key words that it understands, looking you with a sweet look on its face (>>>), and waiting for you to say something it understands. When Python says "SyntaxError: invalid syntax", it is simply wagging its tail and saying, "You seemed to say something but I just don't understand what you meant, but please keep talking to me (>>>)."

As your programs become increasingly sophisticated, you will encounter three general types of errors:

Syntax errors These are the first errors you will make and the easiest to fix. A syntax error means that you have violated the "grammar" rules of Python. Python does its best to point right at the line and character where it noticed it was confused. The only tricky bit of syntax errors is that sometimes the mistake that needs fixing is actually earlier in the program than where Python *noticed* it was confused. So the line and character that Python indicates in a syntax error may just be a starting point for your investigation.

Logic errors A logic error is when your program has good syntax but there is a mistake in the order of the statements or perhaps a mistake in how the statements relate to one another. A good example of a logic error might be, "take a drink from your water bottle, put it in your backpack, walk to the library, and then put the top back on the bottle."

Semantic errors A semantic error is when your description of the steps to take is syntactically perfect and in the right order, but there is simply a mistake in the program. The program is perfectly correct but it does not do what you *intended* for it to do. A simple example would be if you were giving a person directions to a restaurant and said, "...when you reach the intersection with the gas station, turn left and go one mile and the restaurant is a red building on your left." Your friend is very late and calls you to tell you that they are on a farm and walking around behind a barn, with no sign of a restaurant. Then you say "did you turn left or right at the gas station?" and they say, "I followed your directions perfectly, I have them written down, it says turn left and go one mile at the gas station." Then you say, "I am very sorry, because

while my instructions were syntactically correct, they sadly contained a small but undetected semantic error.”.

Again in all three types of errors, Python is merely trying its hardest to do exactly what you have asked.

1.11 Debugging

When Python spits out an error or even when it gives you a result that is different from what you had intended, then begins the hunt for the cause of the error. Debugging is the process of finding the cause of the error in your code. When you are debugging a program, and especially if you are working on a hard bug, there are four things to try:

- reading** Examine your code, read it back to yourself, and check that it says what you meant to say.
- running** Experiment by making changes and running different versions. Often if you display the right thing at the right place in the program, the problem becomes obvious, but sometimes you have to spend some time to build scaffolding.
- ruminating** Take some time to think! What kind of error is it: syntax, runtime, semantic? What information can you get from the error messages, or from the output of the program? What kind of error could cause the problem you’re seeing? What did you change last, before the problem appeared?
- retreating** At some point, the best thing to do is back off, undoing recent changes, until you get back to a program that works and that you understand. Then you can start rebuilding.

Beginning programmers sometimes get stuck on one of these activities and forget the others. Finding a hard bug requires reading, running, ruminating, and sometimes retreating. If you get stuck on one of these activities, try the others. Each activity comes with its own failure mode.

For example, reading your code might help if the problem is a typographical error, but not if the problem is a conceptual misunderstanding. If you don’t understand what your program does, you can read it 100 times and never see the error, because the error is in your head.

Running experiments can help, especially if you run small, simple tests. But if you run experiments without thinking or reading your code, you might fall into a pattern I call “random walk programming”, which is the process of making random changes until the program does the right thing. Needless to say, random walk programming can take a long time.

You have to take time to think. Debugging is like an experimental science. You should have at least one hypothesis about what the problem is. If there are two or more possibilities, try to think of a test that would eliminate one of them.

Taking a break helps with the thinking. So does talking. If you explain the problem to someone else (or even to yourself), you will sometimes find the answer before you finish asking the question.

But even the best debugging techniques will fail if there are too many errors, or if the code you are trying to fix is too big and complicated. Sometimes the best option is to retreat, simplifying the program until you get to something that works and that you understand.

Beginning programmers are often reluctant to retreat because they can't stand to delete a line of code (even if it's wrong). If it makes you feel better, copy your program into another file before you start stripping it down. Then you can paste the pieces back in a little bit at a time.

1.12 The learning journey

As you progress through the rest of the book, don't be afraid if the concepts don't seem to fit together well the first time. When you were learning to speak, it was not a problem for your first few years that you just made cute gurgling noises. And it was OK if it took six months for you to move from simple vocabulary to simple sentences and took 5-6 more years to move from sentences to paragraphs, and a few more years to be able to write an interesting complete short story on your own.

We want you to learn Python much more rapidly, so we teach it all at the same time over the next few chapters. But it is like learning a new language that takes time to absorb and understand before it feels natural. That leads to some confusion as we visit and revisit topics to try to get you to see the big picture while we are defining the tiny fragments that make up that big picture. While the book is written linearly, and if you are taking a course it will progress in a linear fashion, don't hesitate to be very nonlinear in how you approach the material. Look forwards and backwards and read with a light touch. By skimming more advanced material without fully understanding the details, you can get a better understanding of the "why?" of programming. By reviewing previous material and even redoing earlier exercises, you will realize that you actually learned a lot of material even if the material you are currently staring at seems a bit impenetrable.

Usually when you are learning your first programming language, there are a few wonderful "Ah Hah!" moments where you can look up from pounding away at some rock with a hammer and chisel and step away and see that you are indeed building a beautiful sculpture.

If something seems particularly hard, there is usually no value in staying up all night and staring at it. Take a break, take a nap, have a snack, explain what you are having a problem with to someone (or perhaps your dog), and then come back to it with fresh eyes. I assure you that once you learn the programming concepts in the book you will look back and see that it was all really easy and elegant and it simply took you a bit of time to absorb it.

1.13 Glossary

bug An error in a program.

central processing unit The heart of any computer. It is what runs the software that we write; also called "CPU" or "the processor".

compile To translate a program written in a high-level language into a low-level language all at once, in preparation for later execution.

high-level language A programming language like Python that is designed to be easy for humans to read and write.

interactive mode A way of using the Python interpreter by typing commands and expressions at the prompt.

interpret To execute a program in a high-level language by translating it one line at a time.

low-level language A programming language that is designed to be easy for a computer to execute; also called “machine code” or “assembly language”.

machine code The lowest-level language for software, which is the language that is directly executed by the central processing unit (CPU).

main memory Stores programs and data. Main memory loses its information when the power is turned off.

parse To examine a program and analyze the syntactic structure.

portability A property of a program that can run on more than one kind of computer.

print function An instruction that causes the Python interpreter to display a value on the screen.

problem solving The process of formulating a problem, finding a solution, and expressing the solution.

program A set of instructions that specifies a computation.

prompt When a program displays a message and pauses for the user to type some input to the program.

secondary memory Stores programs and data and retains its information even when the power is turned off. Generally slower than main memory. Examples of secondary memory include disk drives and flash memory in USB sticks.

semantics The meaning of a program.

semantic error An error in a program that makes it do something other than what the programmer intended.

source code A program in a high-level language.

1.14 Exercises

Exercise 1: What is the function of the secondary memory in a computer?

- a) Execute all of the computation and logic of the program
- b) Retrieve web pages over the Internet
- c) Store information for the long term, even beyond a power cycle
- d) Take input from the user

Exercise 2: What is a program?

Exercise 3: What is the difference between a compiler and an interpreter?

Exercise 4: Which of the following contains “machine code”?

- a) The Python interpreter
- b) The keyboard
- c) Python source file
- d) A word processing document

Exercise 5: What is wrong with the following code:

```
>>> printt 'Hello world!'
File "<stdin>", line 1
    printt 'Hello world!'
          ^
SyntaxError: invalid syntax
>>>
```

Exercise 6: Where in the computer is a variable such as “x” stored after the following Python line finishes?

```
x = 123
```

- a) Central processing unit
- b) Main Memory
- c) Secondary Memory
- d) Input Devices
- e) Output Devices

Exercise 7: What will the following program print out:

```
x = 43
x = x - 1
print(x)
```

- a) 43
- b) 42
- c) $x + 1$
- d) Error because $x = x + 1$ is not possible mathematically

Exercise 8: Explain each of the following using an example of a human capability: (1) Central processing unit, (2) Main Memory, (3) Secondary Memory, (4) Input Device, and (5) Output Device. For example, “What is the human equivalent to a Central Processing Unit”?

Chapter 2

Variables, expressions, and statements

2.1 Values and types

A *value* is one of the basic things a program works with, like a letter or a number. The values we have seen so far are 1, 2, and “Hello, World!”

These values belong to different *types*: 2 is an integer, and “Hello, World!” is a *string*, so called because it contains a “string” of letters. You (and the interpreter) can identify strings because they are enclosed in quotation marks.

The `print` statement also works for integers. We use the `python` command to start the interpreter.

```
python
>>> print(4)
4
```

If you are not sure what type a value has, the interpreter can tell you.

```
>>> type('Hello, World!')
<class 'str'>
>>> type(17)
<class 'int'>
```

Not surprisingly, strings belong to the type `str` and integers belong to the type `int`. Less obviously, numbers with a decimal point belong to a type called `float`, because these numbers are represented in a format called *floating point*.

```
>>> type(3.2)
<class 'float'>
```

What about values like “17” and “3.2”? They look like numbers, but they are in quotation marks like strings.

```
>>> type('17')
<class 'str'>
>>> type('3.2')
<class 'str'>
```

They're strings.

When you type a large integer, you might be tempted to use commas between groups of three digits, as in 1,000,000. This is not a legal integer in Python, but it is legal:

```
>>> print(1,000,000)
1 0 0
```

Well, that's not what we expected at all! Python interprets 1,000,000 as a comma-separated sequence of integers, which it prints with spaces between.

This is the first example we have seen of a semantic error: the code runs without producing an error message, but it doesn't do the "right" thing.

2.2 Variables

One of the most powerful features of a programming language is the ability to manipulate *variables*. A variable is a name that refers to a value.

An *assignment statement* creates new variables and gives them values:

```
>>> message = 'And now for something completely different'
>>> n = 17
>>> pi = 3.1415926535897931
```

This example makes three assignments. The first assigns a string to a new variable named `message`; the second assigns the integer 17 to `n`; the third assigns the (approximate) value of π to `pi`.

To display the value of a variable, you can use a print statement:

```
>>> print(n)
17
>>> print(pi)
3.141592653589793
```

The type of a variable is the type of the value it refers to.

```
>>> type(message)
<class 'str'>
>>> type(n)
<class 'int'>
>>> type(pi)
<class 'float'>
```

2.3 Variable names and keywords

Programmers generally choose names for their variables that are meaningful and document what the variable is used for.

Variable names can be arbitrarily long. They can contain both letters and numbers, but they cannot start with a number. It is legal to use uppercase letters, but it is a good idea to begin variable names with a lowercase letter (you'll see why later).

The underscore character (`_`) can appear in a name. It is often used in names with multiple words, such as `my_name` or `airspeed_of_unladen_swallow`. Variable names can start with an underscore character, but we generally avoid doing this unless we are writing library code for others to use.

If you give a variable an illegal name, you get a syntax error:

```
>>> 76trombones = 'big parade'
SyntaxError: invalid syntax
>>> more@ = 1000000
SyntaxError: invalid syntax
>>> class = 'Advanced Theoretical Zymurgy'
SyntaxError: invalid syntax
```

`76trombones` is illegal because it begins with a number. `more@` is illegal because it contains an illegal character, `@`. But what's wrong with `class`?

It turns out that `class` is one of Python's *keywords*. The interpreter uses keywords to recognize the structure of the program, and they cannot be used as variable names.

Python reserves 35 keywords:

<code>False</code>	<code>await</code>	<code>else</code>	<code>import</code>	<code>pass</code>
<code>None</code>	<code>break</code>	<code>except</code>	<code>in</code>	<code>raise</code>
<code>True</code>	<code>class</code>	<code>finally</code>	<code>is</code>	<code>return</code>
<code>and</code>	<code>continue</code>	<code>for</code>	<code>lambda</code>	<code>try</code>
<code>as</code>	<code>def</code>	<code>from</code>	<code>nonlocal</code>	<code>while</code>
<code>assert</code>	<code>del</code>	<code>global</code>	<code>not</code>	<code>with</code>
<code>async</code>	<code>elif</code>	<code>if</code>	<code>or</code>	<code>yield</code>

You might want to keep this list handy. If the interpreter complains about one of your variable names and you don't know why, see if it is on this list.

2.4 Statements

A *statement* is a unit of code that the Python interpreter can execute. We have seen two kinds of statements: `print` being an expression statement and assignment.

When you type a statement in interactive mode, the interpreter executes it and displays the result, if there is one.

A script usually contains a sequence of statements. If there is more than one statement, the results appear one at a time as the statements execute.

For example, the script

```
print(1)
x = 2
print(x)
```

produces the output

```
1
2
```

The assignment statement produces no output.

2.5 Operators and operands

Operators are special symbols that represent computations like addition and multiplication. The values the operator is applied to are called *operands*.

The operators `+`, `-`, `*`, `/`, and `**` perform addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and exponentiation, as in the following examples:

```
20+32
hour-1
hour*60+minute
minute/60
5**2
(5+9)*(15-7)
```

There has been a change in the division operator between Python 2 and Python 3. In Python 3, the result of this division is a floating point result:

```
>>> minute = 59
>>> minute/60
0.9833333333333333
```

The division operator in Python 2 would divide two integers and truncate the result to an integer:

```
>>> minute = 59
>>> minute/60
0
```

To obtain the same answer in Python 3 use floored (`//` integer) division.


```
>>> minute = 59
>>> minute//60
0
```

In Python 3 integer division functions much more as you would expect if you entered the expression on a calculator.

2.6 Expressions

An *expression* is a combination of values, variables, and operators. A value all by itself is considered an expression, and so is a variable, so the following are all legal expressions (assuming that the variable `x` has been assigned a value):

```
17
x
x + 17
```

If you type an expression in interactive mode, the interpreter *evaluates* it and displays the result:

```
>>> 1 + 1
2
```

But in a script, an expression all by itself doesn't do anything! This is a common source of confusion for beginners.

Exercise 1: Type the following statements in the Python interpreter to see what they do:

```
5
x = 5
x + 1
```

2.7 Order of operations

When more than one operator appears in an expression, the order of evaluation depends on the *rules of precedence*. For mathematical operators, Python follows mathematical convention. The acronym *PEMDAS* is a useful way to remember the rules:

- Parentheses have the highest precedence and can be used to force an expression to evaluate in the order you want. Since expressions in parentheses are evaluated first, `2 * (3-1)` is 4, and `(1+1)**(5-2)` is 8. You can also use parentheses to make an expression easier to read, as in `(minute * 100) / 60`, even if it doesn't change the result.

- Exponentiation has the next highest precedence, so $2**1+1$ is 3, not 4, and $3*1**3$ is 3, not 27.
- Multiplication and Division have the same precedence, which is higher than Addition and Subtraction, which also have the same precedence. So $2*3-1$ is 5, not 4, and $6+4/2$ is 8, not 5.
- Operators with the same precedence are evaluated from left to right. So the expression $5-3-1$ is 1, not 3, because the $5-3$ happens first and then 1 is subtracted from 2.

When in doubt, always put parentheses in your expressions to make sure the computations are performed in the order you intend.

2.8 Modulus operator

The *modulus operator* works on integers and yields the remainder when the first operand is divided by the second. In Python, the modulus operator is a percent sign (%). The syntax is the same as for other operators:

```
>>> quotient = 7 // 3
>>> print(quotient)
2
>>> remainder = 7 % 3
>>> print(remainder)
1
```

So 7 divided by 3 is 2 with 1 left over.

The modulus operator turns out to be surprisingly useful. For example, you can check whether one number is divisible by another: if $x \% y$ is zero, then x is divisible by y .

You can also extract the right-most digit or digits from a number. For example, $x \% 10$ yields the right-most digit of x (in base 10). Similarly, $x \% 100$ yields the last two digits.

2.9 String operations

The $+$ operator works with strings, but it is not addition in the mathematical sense. Instead it performs *concatenation*, which means joining the strings by linking them end to end. For example:

```
>>> first = 10
>>> second = 15
>>> print(first+second)
25
>>> first = '100'
```

```
>>> second = '150'
>>> print(first + second)
100150
```

The `*` operator also works with strings by multiplying the content of a string by an integer. For example:

```
>>> first = 'Test '
>>> second = 3
>>> print(first * second)
Test Test Test
```

2.10 Asking the user for input

Sometimes we would like to take the value for a variable from the user via their keyboard. Python provides a built-in function called `input` that gets input from the keyboard¹. When this function is called, the program stops and waits for the user to type something. When the user presses **Return** or **Enter**, the program resumes and `input` returns what the user typed as a string.

```
>>> inp = input()
Some silly stuff
>>> print(inp)
Some silly stuff
```

Before getting input from the user, it is a good idea to print a prompt telling the user what to input. You can pass a string to `input` to be displayed to the user before pausing for input:

```
>>> name = input('What is your name?\n')
What is your name?
Chuck
>>> print(name)
Chuck
```

The sequence `\n` at the end of the prompt represents a *newline*, which is a special character that causes a line break. That's why the user's input appears below the prompt.

If you expect the user to type an integer, you can try to convert the return value to `int` using the `int()` function:

```
>>> prompt = 'What...is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?\n'
>>> speed = input(prompt)
What...is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?
17
```

¹In Python 2, this function was named `raw_input`.

```
>>> int(speed)
17
>>> int(speed) + 5
22
```

But if the user types something other than a string of digits, you get an error:

```
>>> speed = input(prompt)
What...is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?
What do you mean, an African or a European swallow?
>>> int(speed)
ValueError: invalid literal for int() with
base 10: 'What do you mean, an African or a European swallow?'
```

We will see how to handle this kind of error later.

2.11 Comments

As programs get bigger and more complicated, they get more difficult to read. Formal languages are dense, and it is often difficult to look at a piece of code and figure out what it is doing, or why.

For this reason, it is a good idea to add notes to your programs to explain in natural language what the program is doing. These notes are called *comments*, and in Python they start with the `#` symbol:

```
# compute the percentage of the hour that has elapsed
percentage = (minute * 100) / 60
```

In this case, the comment appears on a line by itself. You can also put comments at the end of a line:

```
percentage = (minute * 100) / 60      # percentage of an hour
```

Everything from the `#` to the end of the line is ignored; it has no effect on the program.

Comments are most useful when they document non-obvious features of the code. It is reasonable to assume that the reader can figure out *what* the code does; it is much more useful to explain *why*.

This comment is redundant with the code and useless:

```
v = 5      # assign 5 to v
```

This comment contains useful information that is not in the code:

```
v = 5      # velocity in meters/second.
```

Good variable names can reduce the need for comments, but long names can make complex expressions hard to read, so there is a trade-off.

2.12 Choosing mnemonic variable names

As long as you follow the simple rules of variable naming, and avoid reserved words, you have a lot of choice when you name your variables. In the beginning, this choice can be confusing both when you read a program and when you write your own programs. For example, the following three programs are identical in terms of what they accomplish, but very different when you read them and try to understand them.

```
a = 35.0
b = 12.50
c = a * b
print(c)
```

```
hours = 35.0
rate = 12.50
pay = hours * rate
print(pay)
```

```
x1q3z9ahd = 35.0
x1q3z9afd = 12.50
x1q3p9afd = x1q3z9ahd * x1q3z9afd
print(x1q3p9afd)
```

The Python interpreter sees all three of these programs as *exactly the same* but humans see and understand these programs quite differently. Humans will most quickly understand the *intent* of the second program because the programmer has chosen variable names that reflect their intent regarding what data will be stored in each variable.

We call these wisely chosen variable names “mnemonic variable names”. The word *mnemonic*² means “memory aid”. We choose mnemonic variable names to help us remember why we created the variable in the first place.

While this all sounds great, and it is a very good idea to use mnemonic variable names, mnemonic variable names can get in the way of a beginning programmer’s ability to parse and understand code. This is because beginning programmers have not yet memorized the reserved words (there are only 35 of them) and sometimes variables with names that are too descriptive start to look like part of the language and not just well-chosen variable names.

Take a quick look at the following Python sample code which loops through some data. We will cover loops soon, but for now try to just puzzle through what this means:

```
for word in words:
    print(word)
```

²See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mnemonic> for an extended description of the word “mnemonic”.

What is happening here? Which of the tokens (`for`, `word`, `in`, etc.) are reserved words and which are just variable names? Does Python understand at a fundamental level the notion of words? Beginning programmers have trouble separating what parts of the code *must* be the same as this example and what parts of the code are simply choices made by the programmer.

The following code is equivalent to the above code:

```
for slice in pizza:
    print(slice)
```

It is easier for the beginning programmer to look at this code and know which parts are reserved words defined by Python and which parts are simply variable names chosen by the programmer. It is pretty clear that Python has no fundamental understanding of `pizza` and `slices` and the fact that a pizza consists of a set of one or more slices.

But if our program is truly about reading data and looking for words in the data, `pizza` and `slice` are very un-mnemonic variable names. Choosing them as variable names distracts from the meaning of the program.

After a pretty short period of time, you will know the most common reserved words and you will start to see the reserved words jumping out at you:

The parts of the code that are defined by Python (`for`, `in`, `print`, and `:`) are in bold and the programmer-chosen variables (`word` and `words`) are not in bold. Many text editors are aware of Python syntax and will color reserved words differently to give you clues to keep your variables and reserved words separate. After a while you will begin to read Python and quickly determine what is a variable and what is a reserved word.

2.13 Debugging

At this point, the syntax error you are most likely to make is an illegal variable name, like `class` and `yield`, which are keywords, or `odd~job` and `US$`, which contain illegal characters.

If you put a space in a variable name, Python thinks it is two operands without an operator:

```
>>> bad name = 5
SyntaxError: invalid syntax
```

For syntax errors, the error messages don't help much. The most common messages are `SyntaxError: invalid syntax` which is not very informative.

The runtime error you are most likely to make is a “use before def;” that is, trying to use a variable before you have assigned a value. This can happen if you spell a variable name wrong:

```
>>> principal = 327.68
>>> interest = principle * rate
NameError: name 'principle' is not defined
```

Variables names are case sensitive, so `LaTeX` is not the same as `latex`.

At this point, the most likely cause of a semantic error is the order of operations. For example, to evaluate $1/2\pi$, you might be tempted to write

```
>>> 1.0 / 2.0 * pi
```

But the division happens first, so you would get $\pi/2$, which is not the same thing! There is no way for Python to know what you meant to write, so in this case you don't get an error message; you just get the wrong answer.

2.14 Glossary

assignment A statement that assigns a value to a variable.

concatenate To join two operands end to end.

comment Information in a program that is meant for other programmers (or anyone reading the source code) and has no effect on the execution of the program.

evaluate To simplify an expression by performing the operations in order to yield a single value.

expression A combination of variables, operators, and values that represents a single result value.

floating point A type that represents numbers with fractional parts.

integer A type that represents whole numbers.

keyword A reserved word that is used by the compiler to parse a program; you cannot use keywords like `if`, `def`, and `while` as variable names.

mnemonic A memory aid. We often give variables mnemonic names to help us remember what is stored in the variable.

modulus operator An operator, denoted with a percent sign (%), that works on integers and yields the remainder when one number is divided by another.

operand One of the values on which an operator operates.

operator A special symbol that represents a simple computation like addition, multiplication, or string concatenation.

rules of precedence The set of rules governing the order in which expressions involving multiple operators and operands are evaluated.

statement A section of code that represents a command or action. So far, the statements we have seen are assignments and print expression statement.

string A type that represents sequences of characters.

type A category of values. The types we have seen so far are integers (type `int`), floating-point numbers (type `float`), and strings (type `str`).

value One of the basic units of data, like a number or string, that a program manipulates.

variable A name that refers to a value.

2.15 Exercises

Exercise 2: Write a program that uses `input` to prompt a user for their name and then welcomes them.

```
Enter your name: Chuck
Hello Chuck
```

Exercise 3: Write a program to prompt the user for hours and rate per hour to compute gross pay.

```
Enter Hours: 35
Enter Rate: 2.75
Pay: 96.25
```

We won't worry about making sure our pay has exactly two digits after the decimal place for now. If you want, you can play with the built-in Python `round` function to properly round the resulting pay to two decimal places.

Exercise 4: Assume that we execute the following assignment statements:

```
width = 17
height = 12.0
```

For each of the following expressions, write the value of the expression and the type (of the value of the expression).

1. `width//2`
2. `width/2.0`
3. `height/3`
4. `1 + 2 * 5`

Use the Python interpreter to check your answers.

Exercise 5: Write a program which prompts the user for a Celsius temperature, convert the temperature to Fahrenheit, and print out the converted temperature.

Chapter 3

Conditional execution

3.1 Boolean expressions

A *boolean expression* is an expression that is either true or false. The following examples use the operator `==`, which compares two operands and produces `True` if they are equal and `False` otherwise:

```
>>> 5 == 5
True
>>> 5 == 6
False
```

`True` and `False` are special values that belong to the class `bool`; they are not strings:

```
>>> type(True)
<class 'bool'>
>>> type(False)
<class 'bool'>
```

The `==` operator is one of the *comparison operators*; the others are:

<code>x != y</code>	<code># x is not equal to y</code>
<code>x > y</code>	<code># x is greater than y</code>
<code>x < y</code>	<code># x is less than y</code>
<code>x >= y</code>	<code># x is greater than or equal to y</code>
<code>x <= y</code>	<code># x is less than or equal to y</code>
<code>x is y</code>	<code># x is the same as y</code>
<code>x is not y</code>	<code># x is not the same as y</code>

Although these operations are probably familiar to you, the Python symbols are different from the mathematical symbols for the same operations. A common error is to use a single equal sign (`=`) instead of a double equal sign (`==`). Remember that `=` is an assignment operator and `==` is a comparison operator. There is no such thing as `=<` or `=>`.

3.2 Logical operators

There are three *logical operators*: **and**, **or**, and **not**. The semantics (meaning) of these operators is similar to their meaning in English. For example,

```
x > 0 and x < 10
```

is true only if `x` is greater than 0 *and* less than 10.

`n%2 == 0 or n%3 == 0` is true if *either* of the conditions is true, that is, if the number is divisible by 2 *or* 3.

Finally, the **not** operator negates a boolean expression, so **not** (`x > y`) is true if `x > y` is false.

```
>>> x = 1
>>> y = 2
>>> x > y
False
>>> not (x > y)
True
```

Strictly speaking, the operands of the logical operators should be boolean expressions, but Python is not very strict. Any nonzero number is interpreted as “true.”

```
>>> 17 and True
True
```

This flexibility can be useful in some situations, but there are some subtleties to it that might be confusing. You might want to avoid it until you are sure you know what you are doing.

3.3 Conditional execution

In order to write useful programs, we almost always need the ability to check conditions and change the behavior of the program accordingly. *Conditional statements* give us this ability. The simplest form is the **if** statement:

```
if x > 0 :
    print('x is positive')
```

The boolean expression after the **if** statement is called the *condition*. We end the **if** statement with a colon character (`:`) and the line(s) after the **if** statement are indented.

If the logical condition is true, then the indented statement gets executed. If the logical condition is false, the indented statement is skipped.

if statements have the same structure as function definitions or **for** loops¹. The statement consists of a header line that ends with the colon character (`:`) followed

¹We will learn about functions in Chapter 4 and loops in Chapter 5.

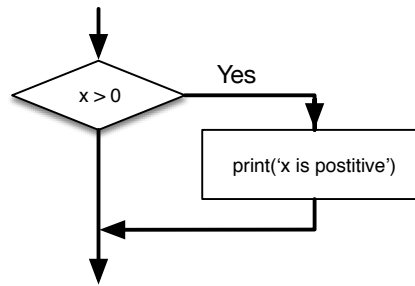


Figure 3.1: If Logic

by an indented block. Statements like this are called *compound statements* because they stretch across more than one line.

```

if x > y:
    print(x)
    print(y)

```

There is no limit on the number of statements that can appear in the body, but there must be at least one. Occasionally, it is useful to have a body with no statements (usually as a place holder for code you haven't written yet). In that case, you can use the `pass` statement to pass the Python interpreter check, which does nothing.

```

if x < 0 :
    pass    # need to handle negative values, do nothing for now.

```

If you enter an `if` statement in the Python interpreter, the prompt will change from three chevrons (`>>>`) to three dots (`...`) to indicate you are in the middle of a block of statements, as shown below:

```

>>> x = 3
>>> if x < 10:
...     print('Small')
...
Small
>>>

```

When using the Python interpreter, you must leave a blank line at the end of a block, otherwise Python will return an error:

```

>>> x = 3
>>> if x < 10:
...     print('Small')
...     print('Done')
File "<stdin>", line 3
    print('Done')
    ^
SyntaxError: invalid syntax

```

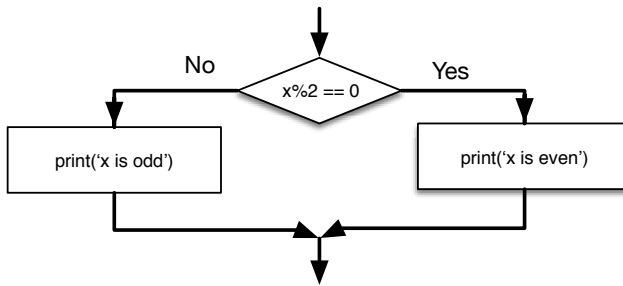


Figure 3.2: If-Then-Else Logic

A blank line at the end of a block of statements is not necessary when writing and executing a script, but it may improve readability of your code.

3.4 Alternative execution

A second form of the `if` statement is *alternative execution*, in which there are two possibilities and the condition determines which one gets executed. The syntax looks like this:

```

if x % 2 == 0:
    print('x is even')
else:
    print('x is odd')

```

If the remainder when `x` is divided by 2 is 0, then we know that `x` is even, and the program displays a message to that effect. If the condition is false, the second set of statements is executed.

Since the condition must either be true or false, exactly one of the alternatives will be executed. The alternatives are called *branches*, because they are branches in the flow of execution.

3.5 Chained conditionals

Sometimes there are more than two possibilities and we need more than two branches. One way to express a computation like that is a *chained conditional*:

```

if x < y:
    print('x is less than y')
elif x > y:
    print('x is greater than y')
else:
    print('x and y are equal')

```

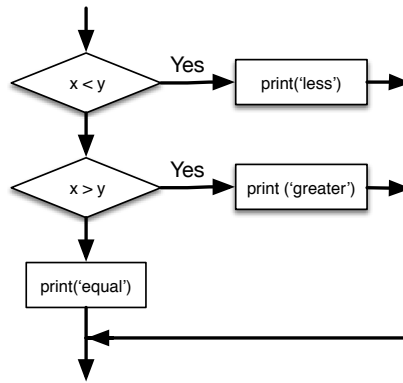


Figure 3.3: If-Then-ElseIf Logic

`elif` is an abbreviation of “else if.” Again, exactly one branch will be executed.

There is no limit on the number of `elif` statements. If there is an `else` clause, it has to be at the end, but there doesn’t have to be one.

```

if choice == 'a':
    print('Bad guess')
elif choice == 'b':
    print('Good guess')
elif choice == 'c':
    print('Close, but not correct')
  
```

Each condition is checked in order. If the first is false, the next is checked, and so on. If one of them is true, the corresponding branch executes, and the statement ends. Even if more than one condition is true, only the first true branch executes.

3.6 Nested conditionals

One conditional can also be nested within another. We could have written the three-branch example like this:

```

if x == y:
    print('x and y are equal')
else:
    if x < y:
        print('x is less than y')
    else:
        print('x is greater than y')
  
```

The outer conditional contains two branches. The first branch contains a simple statement. The second branch contains another `if` statement, which has two branches of its own. Those two branches are both simple statements, although they could have been conditional statements as well.

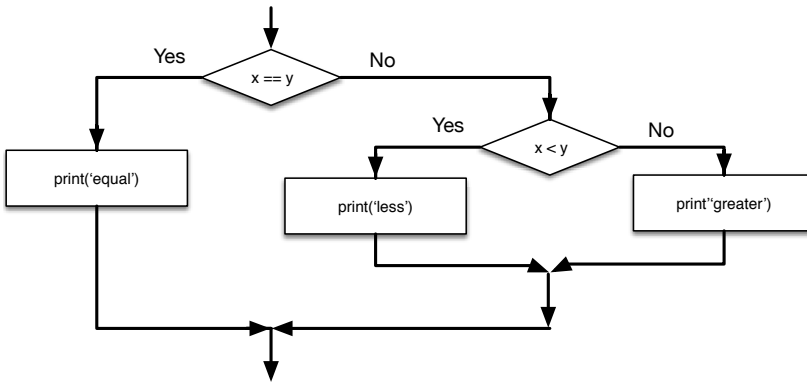


Figure 3.4: Nested If Statements

Although the indentation of the statements makes the structure apparent, *nested conditionals* become difficult to read very quickly. In general, it is a good idea to avoid them when you can.

Logical operators often provide a way to simplify nested conditional statements. For example, we can rewrite the following code using a single conditional:

```

if 0 < x:
    if x < 10:
        print('x is a positive single-digit number.')
  
```

The `print` statement is executed only when we pass both conditionals. We can get the same effect with the `and` operator:

```

if 0 < x and x < 10:
    print('x is a positive single-digit number.')
  
```

3.7 Catching exceptions using `try` and `except`

Earlier we saw a code segment where we used the `input` and `int` functions to read and parse an integer number entered by the user. We also saw how treacherous doing this could be:

```

>>> prompt = "What is the air velocity of an unladen swallow?\n"
>>> speed = input(prompt)
What is the air velocity of an unladen swallow?
What do you mean, an African or a European swallow?
>>> int(speed)
ValueError: invalid literal for int() with
base 10: 'What do you mean, an African or a European swallow?'
>>>
  
```

When we are executing these statements in the Python interpreter, we get a new prompt from the interpreter, think “oops”, and move on to our next statement.

However if you place this code in a Python script and this error occurs, your script immediately stops in its tracks with a traceback. It does not execute the following statement.

Here is a sample program to convert a Fahrenheit temperature to a Celsius temperature:

```
inp = input('Enter Fahrenheit Temperature: ')
fahr = float(inp)
cel = (fahr - 32.0) * 5.0 / 9.0
print(cel)
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/fahren.py>

If we execute this code and give it invalid input, it simply fails with an unfriendly error message:

```
python fahren.py
Enter Fahrenheit Temperature:72
22.22222222222222
```

```
python fahren.py
Enter Fahrenheit Temperature:fred
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "fahren.py", line 2, in <module>
    fahr = float(inp)
ValueError: could not convert string to float: 'fred'
```

There is a conditional execution structure built into Python to handle these types of expected and unexpected errors called “try / except”. The purpose of **try** and **except** is that you know that some sequence of instruction(s) may have a problem and you want to add some statements to be executed if an error occurs. These extra statements (the **except** block) are ignored if there is no error.

You can think of the **try** and **except** feature in Python as an “insurance policy” on a sequence of statements.

We can rewrite our temperature converter as follows:

```
inp = input('Enter Fahrenheit Temperature:')
try:
    fahr = float(inp)
    cel = (fahr - 32.0) * 5.0 / 9.0
    print(cel)
except:
    print('Please enter a number')
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/fahren2.py>

Python starts by executing the sequence of statements in the `try` block. If all goes well, it skips the `except` block and proceeds. If an exception occurs in the `try` block, Python jumps out of the `try` block and executes the sequence of statements in the `except` block.

```
python fahrenheit.py
Enter Fahrenheit Temperature:72
22.22222222222222
```

```
python fahrenheit.py
Enter Fahrenheit Temperature:fred
Please enter a number
```

Handling an exception with a `try` statement is called *catching* an exception. In this example, the `except` clause prints an error message. In general, catching an exception gives you a chance to fix the problem, or try again, or at least end the program gracefully.

3.8 Short-circuit evaluation of logical expressions

When Python is processing a logical expression such as `x >= 2 and (x/y) > 2`, it evaluates the expression from left to right. Because of the definition of `and`, if `x` is less than 2, the expression `x >= 2` is `False` and so the whole expression is `False` regardless of whether `(x/y) > 2` evaluates to `True` or `False`.

When Python detects that there is nothing to be gained by evaluating the rest of a logical expression, it stops its evaluation and does not do the computations in the rest of the logical expression. When the evaluation of a logical expression stops because the overall value is already known, it is called *short-circuiting* the evaluation.

While this may seem like a fine point, the short-circuit behavior leads to a clever technique called the *guardian pattern*. Consider the following code sequence in the Python interpreter:

```
>>> x = 6
>>> y = 2
>>> x >= 2 and (x/y) > 2
True
>>> x = 1
>>> y = 0
>>> x >= 2 and (x/y) > 2
False
>>> x = 6
>>> y = 0
>>> x >= 2 and (x/y) > 2
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
ZeroDivisionError: division by zero
>>>
```


The third calculation failed because Python was evaluating (x/y) and y was zero, which causes a runtime error. But the first and the second examples did *not* fail because in the first calculation y was non zero and in the second one the first part of these expressions $x \geq 2$ evaluated to `False` so the (x/y) was not ever executed due to the *short-circuit* rule and there was no error.

We can construct the logical expression to strategically place a *guard* evaluation just before the evaluation that might cause an error as follows:

```
>>> x = 1
>>> y = 0
>>> x >= 2 and y != 0 and (x/y) > 2
False
>>> x = 6
>>> y = 0
>>> x >= 2 and y != 0 and (x/y) > 2
False
>>> x >= 2 and (x/y) > 2 and y != 0
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
ZeroDivisionError: division by zero
>>>
```

In the first logical expression, $x \geq 2$ is `False` so the evaluation stops at the `and`. In the second logical expression, $x \geq 2$ is `True` but $y \neq 0$ is `False` so we never reach (x/y) .

In the third logical expression, the $y \neq 0$ is *after* the (x/y) calculation so the expression fails with an error.

In the second expression, we say that $y \neq 0$ acts as a *guard* to insure that we only execute (x/y) if y is non-zero.

3.9 Debugging

The traceback Python displays when an error occurs contains a lot of information, but it can be overwhelming. The most useful parts are usually:

- What kind of error it was, and
- Where it occurred.

Syntax errors are usually easy to find, but there are a few gotchas. Whitespace errors can be tricky because spaces and tabs are invisible and we are used to ignoring them.

```
>>> x = 5
>>> y = 6
      File "<stdin>", line 1
        y = 6
        ^
IndentationError: unexpected indent
```

In this example, the problem is that the second line is indented by one space. But the error message points to `y`, which is misleading. In general, error messages indicate where the problem was discovered, but the actual error might be earlier in the code, sometimes on a previous line.

In general, error messages tell you where the problem was discovered, but that is often not where it was caused.

3.10 Glossary

body The sequence of statements within a compound statement.

boolean expression An expression whose value is either `True` or `False`.

branch One of the alternative sequences of statements in a conditional statement.

chained conditional A conditional statement with a series of alternative branches.

comparison operator One of the operators that compares its operands: `==`, `!=`, `>`, `<`, `>=`, and `<=`.

conditional statement A statement that controls the flow of execution depending on some condition.

condition The boolean expression in a conditional statement that determines which branch is executed.

compound statement A statement that consists of a header and a body. The header ends with a colon (`:`). The body is indented relative to the header.

guardian pattern Where we construct a logical expression with additional comparisons to take advantage of the short-circuit behavior.

logical operator One of the operators that combines boolean expressions: `and`, `or`, and `not`.

nested conditional A conditional statement that appears in one of the branches of another conditional statement.

traceback A list of the functions that are executing, printed when an exception occurs.

short circuit When Python is part-way through evaluating a logical expression and stops the evaluation because Python knows the final value for the expression without needing to evaluate the rest of the expression.

3.11 Exercises

Exercise 1: Rewrite your pay computation to give the employee 1.5 times the hourly rate for hours worked above 40 hours.

```
Enter Hours: 45
Enter Rate: 10
Pay: 475.0
```

Exercise 2: Rewrite your pay program using `try` and `except` so that your program handles non-numeric input gracefully by printing a message and exiting the program. The following shows two executions of the program:

```
Enter Hours: 20
Enter Rate: nine
Error, please enter numeric input
```

```
Enter Hours: forty
Error, please enter numeric input
```

Exercise 3: Write a program to prompt for a score between 0.0 and 1.0. If the score is out of range, print an error message. If the score is between 0.0 and 1.0, print a grade using the following table:

Score	Grade
≥ 0.9	A
≥ 0.8	B
≥ 0.7	C
≥ 0.6	D
< 0.6	F

```
Enter score: 0.95
A
```

```
Enter score: perfect
Bad score
```

```
Enter score: 10.0
Bad score
```

```
Enter score: 0.75
C
```

```
Enter score: 0.5
F
```

Run the program repeatedly as shown above to test the various different values for input.

Chapter 4

Functions

4.1 Function calls

In the context of programming, a *function* is a named sequence of statements that performs a computation. When you define a function, you specify the name and the sequence of statements. Later, you can “call” the function by name. We have already seen one example of a *function call*:

```
>>> type(32)
<class 'int'>
```

The name of the function is `type`. The expression in parentheses is called the *argument* of the function. The argument is a value or variable that we are passing into the function as input to the function. The result, for the `type` function, is the type of the argument.

It is common to say that a function “takes” an argument and “returns” a result. The result is called the *return value*.

4.2 Built-in functions

Python provides a number of important built-in functions that we can use without needing to provide the function definition. The creators of Python wrote a set of functions to solve common problems and included them in Python for us to use.

The `max` and `min` functions give us the largest and smallest values in a list, respectively:

```
>>> max('Hello world')
'w'
>>> min('Hello world')
' '
>>>
```

The `max` function tells us the “largest character” in the string (which turns out to be the letter “w”) and the `min` function shows us the smallest character (which turns out to be a space).

Another very common built-in function is the `len` function which tells us how many items are in its argument. If the argument to `len` is a string, it returns the number of characters in the string.

```
>>> len('Hello world')
11
>>>
```

These functions are not limited to looking at strings. They can operate on any set of values, as we will see in later chapters.

You should treat the names of built-in functions as reserved words (i.e., avoid using “max” as a variable name).

4.3 Type conversion functions

Python also provides built-in functions that convert values from one type to another. The `int` function takes any value and converts it to an integer, if it can, or complains otherwise:

```
>>> int('32')
32
>>> int('Hello')
ValueError: invalid literal for int() with base 10: 'Hello'
```

`int` can convert floating-point values to integers, but it doesn’t round off; it chops off the fraction part:

```
>>> int(3.99999)
3
>>> int(-2.3)
-2
```

`float` converts integers and strings to floating-point numbers:

```
>>> float(32)
32.0
>>> float('3.14159')
3.14159
```

Finally, `str` converts its argument to a string:

```
>>> str(32)
'32'
>>> str(3.14159)
'3.14159'
```

4.4 Math functions

Python has a `math` module that provides most of the familiar mathematical functions. Before we can use the module, we have to import it:

```
>>> import math
```

This statement creates a *module object* named `math`. If you print the module object, you get some information about it:

```
>>> print(math)
<module 'math' (built-in)>
```

The module object contains the functions and variables defined in the module. To access one of the functions, you have to specify the name of the module and the name of the function, separated by a dot (also known as a period). This format is called *dot notation*.

```
>>> ratio = signal_power / noise_power
>>> decibels = 10 * math.log10(ratio)

>>> radians = 0.7
>>> height = math.sin(radians)
```

The first example computes the logarithm base 10 of the signal-to-noise ratio. The `math` module also provides a function called `log` that computes logarithms base e .

The second example finds the sine of `radians`. The name of the variable is a hint that `sin` and the other trigonometric functions (`cos`, `tan`, etc.) take arguments in radians. To convert from degrees to radians, divide by 360 and multiply by 2π :

```
>>> degrees = 45
>>> radians = degrees / 360.0 * 2 * math.pi
>>> math.sin(radians)
0.7071067811865476
```

The expression `math.pi` gets the variable `pi` from the `math` module. The value of this variable is an approximation of π , accurate to about 15 digits.

If you know your trigonometry, you can check the previous result by comparing it to the square root of two divided by two:

```
>>> math.sqrt(2) / 2.0
0.7071067811865476
```

4.5 Random numbers

Given the same inputs, most computer programs generate the same outputs every time, so they are said to be *deterministic*. Determinism is usually a good thing, since we expect the same calculation to yield the same result. For some applications, though, we want the computer to be unpredictable. Games are an obvious example, but there are more.

Making a program truly nondeterministic turns out to be not so easy, but there are ways to make it at least seem nondeterministic. One of them is to use *algorithms* that generate *pseudorandom* numbers. Pseudorandom numbers are not truly random because they are generated by a deterministic computation, but just by looking at the numbers it is all but impossible to distinguish them from random.

The `random` module provides functions that generate pseudorandom numbers (which I will simply call “random” from here on).

The function `random` returns a random float between 0.0 and 1.0 (including 0.0 but not 1.0). Each time you call `random`, you get the next number in a long series. To see a sample, run this loop:

```
import random

for i in range(10):
    x = random.random()
    print(x)
```

This program produces the following list of 10 random numbers between 0.0 and up to but not including 1.0.

```
0.11132867921152356
0.5950949227890241
0.04820265884996877
0.841003109276478
0.997914947094958
0.04842330803368111
0.7416295948208405
0.510535245390327
0.27447040171978143
0.028511805472785867
```

Exercise 1: Run the program on your system and see what numbers you get. Run the program more than once and see what numbers you get.

The `random` function is only one of many functions that handle random numbers. The function `randint` takes the parameters `low` and `high`, and returns an integer between `low` and `high` (including both).

```
>>> random.randint(5, 10)
5
>>> random.randint(5, 10)
9
```


To choose an element from a sequence at random, you can use `choice`:

```
>>> t = [1, 2, 3]
>>> random.choice(t)
2
>>> random.choice(t)
3
```

The `random` module also provides functions to generate random values from continuous distributions including Gaussian, exponential, gamma, and a few more.

4.6 Adding new functions

So far, we have only been using the functions that come with Python, but it is also possible to add new functions. A *function definition* specifies the name of a new function and the sequence of statements that execute when the function is called. Once we define a function, we can reuse the function over and over throughout our program.

Here is an example:

```
def print_lyrics():
    print("I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay.")
    print('I sleep all night and I work all day.')
```

`def` is a keyword that indicates that this is a function definition. The name of the function is `print_lyrics`. The rules for function names are the same as for variable names: letters, numbers and some punctuation marks are legal, but the first character can't be a number. You can't use a keyword as the name of a function, and you should avoid having a variable and a function with the same name.

The empty parentheses after the name indicate that this function doesn't take any arguments. Later we will build functions that take arguments as their inputs.

The first line of the function definition is called the *header*; the rest is called the *body*. The header has to end with a colon and the body has to be indented. By convention, the indentation is always four spaces. The body can contain any number of statements.

If you type a function definition in interactive mode, the interpreter prints ellipses (...) to let you know that the definition isn't complete:

```
>>> def print_lyrics():
...     print("I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay.")
...     print('I sleep all night and I work all day.')
... 
```

To end the function, you have to enter an empty line (this is not necessary in a script).

Defining a function creates a variable with the same name.

```
>>> print(print_lyrics)
<function print_lyrics at 0xb7e99e9c>
>>> print(type(print_lyrics))
<class 'function'>
```

The value of `print_lyrics` is a *function object*, which has type “function”.

The syntax for calling the new function is the same as for built-in functions:

```
>>> print_lyrics()
I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay.
I sleep all night and I work all day.
```

Once you have defined a function, you can use it inside another function. For example, to repeat the previous refrain, we could write a function called `repeat_lyrics`:

```
def repeat_lyrics():
    print_lyrics()
    print_lyrics()
```

And then call `repeat_lyrics`:

```
>>> repeat_lyrics()
I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay.
I sleep all night and I work all day.
I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay.
I sleep all night and I work all day.
```

But that’s not really how the song goes.

4.7 Definitions and uses

Pulling together the code fragments from the previous section, the whole program looks like this:

```
def print_lyrics():
    print("I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay.")
    print('I sleep all night and I work all day.')

def repeat_lyrics():
    print_lyrics()
    print_lyrics()

repeat_lyrics()
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/lyrics.py>

This program has two function definitions: `print_lyrics` and `repeat_lyrics`. Function definitions get executed just like other statements, but the effect is to create function objects. The statements inside the function do not get executed until the function is called, and the function definition generates no output.

As you might expect, you have to create a function before you can execute it. In other words, the function definition has to be executed before the first time it is called.

Exercise 2: Move the last line of this program to the top, so the function call appears before the definitions. Run the program and see what error message you get.

Exercise 3: Move the function call back to the bottom and move the definition of `print_lyrics` after the definition of `repeat_lyrics`. What happens when you run this program?

4.8 Flow of execution

In order to ensure that a function is defined before its first use, you have to know the order in which statements are executed, which is called the *flow of execution*.

Execution always begins at the first statement of the program. Statements are executed one at a time, in order from top to bottom.

Function *definitions* do not alter the flow of execution of the program, but remember that statements inside the function are not executed until the function is called.

A function call is like a detour in the flow of execution. Instead of going to the next statement, the flow jumps to the body of the function, executes all the statements there, and then comes back to pick up where it left off.

That sounds simple enough, until you remember that one function can call another. While in the middle of one function, the program might have to execute the statements in another function. But while executing that new function, the program might have to execute yet another function!

Fortunately, Python is good at keeping track of where it is, so each time a function completes, the program picks up where it left off in the function that called it. When it gets to the end of the program, it terminates.

What's the moral of this sordid tale? When you read a program, you don't always want to read from top to bottom. Sometimes it makes more sense if you follow the flow of execution.

4.9 Parameters and arguments

Some of the built-in functions we have seen require arguments. For example, when you call `math.sin` you pass a number as an argument. Some functions take more than one argument: `math.pow` takes two, the base and the exponent.

Inside the function, the arguments are assigned to variables called *parameters*. Here is an example of a user-defined function that takes an argument:

```
def print_twice(bruce):
    print(bruce)
    print(bruce)
```

This function assigns the argument to a parameter named **bruce**. When the function is called, it prints the value of the parameter (whatever it is) twice.

This function works with any value that can be printed.

```
>>> print_twice('Spam')
Spam
Spam
>>> print_twice(17)
17
17
>>> import math
>>> print_twice(math.pi)
3.141592653589793
3.141592653589793
```

The same rules of composition that apply to built-in functions also apply to user-defined functions, so we can use any kind of expression as an argument for `print_twice`:

```
>>> print_twice('Spam '*4)
Spam Spam Spam Spam
Spam Spam Spam Spam
>>> print_twice(math.cos(math.pi))
-1.0
-1.0
```

The argument is evaluated before the function is called, so in the examples the expressions `'Spam '*4` and `math.cos(math.pi)` are only evaluated once.

You can also use a variable as an argument:

```
>>> michael = 'Eric, the half a bee.'
>>> print_twice(michael)
Eric, the half a bee.
Eric, the half a bee.
```

The name of the variable we pass as an argument (**michael**) has nothing to do with the name of the parameter (**bruce**). It doesn't matter what the value was called back home (in the caller); here in `print_twice`, we call everybody **bruce**.

4.10 Fruitful functions and void functions

Some of the functions we are using, such as the math functions, yield results; for lack of a better name, I call them *fruitful functions*. Other functions, like `print_twice`, perform an action but don't return a value. They are called *void functions*.

When you call a fruitful function, you almost always want to do something with the result; for example, you might assign it to a variable or use it as part of an expression:

```
x = math.cos(radians)
golden = (math.sqrt(5) + 1) / 2
```

When you call a function in interactive mode, Python displays the result:

```
>>> math.sqrt(5)
2.23606797749979
```

But in a script, if you call a fruitful function and do not store the result of the function in a variable, the return value vanishes into the mist!

```
math.sqrt(5)
```

This script computes the square root of 5, but since it doesn't store the result in a variable or display the result, it is not very useful.

Void functions might display something on the screen or have some other effect, but they don't have a return value. If you try to assign the result to a variable, you get a special value called `None`.

```
>>> result = print_twice('Bing')
Bing
Bing
>>> print(result)
None
```

The value `None` is not the same as the string "None". It is a special value that has its own type:

```
>>> print(type(None))
<class 'NoneType'>
```

To return a result from a function, we use the `return` statement in our function. For example, we could make a very simple function called `addtwo` that adds two numbers together and returns a result.

```
def addtwo(a, b):  
    added = a + b  
    return added
```

```
x = addtwo(3, 5)  
print(x)
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/addtwo.py>

When this script executes, the `print` statement will print out “8” because the `addtwo` function was called with 3 and 5 as arguments. Within the function, the parameters `a` and `b` were 3 and 5 respectively. The function computed the sum of the two numbers and placed it in the local function variable named `added`. Then it used the `return` statement to send the computed value back to the calling code as the function result, which was assigned to the variable `x` and printed out.

4.11 Why functions?

It may not be clear why it is worth the trouble to divide a program into functions. There are several reasons:

- Creating a new function gives you an opportunity to name a group of statements, which makes your program easier to read, understand, and debug.
- Functions can make a program smaller by eliminating repetitive code. Later, if you make a change, you only have to make it in one place.
- Dividing a long program into functions allows you to debug the parts one at a time and then assemble them into a working whole.
- Well-designed functions are often useful for many programs. Once you write and debug one, you can reuse it.

Throughout the rest of the book, often we will use a function definition to explain a concept. Part of the skill of creating and using functions is to have a function properly capture an idea such as “find the smallest value in a list of values”. Later we will show you code that finds the smallest in a list of values and we will present it to you as a function named `min` which takes a list of values as its argument and returns the smallest value in the list.

4.12 Debugging

If you are using a text editor to write your scripts, you might run into problems with spaces and tabs. The best way to avoid these problems is to use spaces exclusively (no tabs). Most text editors that know about Python do this by default, but some don’t.

Tabs and spaces are usually invisible, which makes them hard to debug, so try to find an editor that manages indentation for you.

Also, don't forget to save your program before you run it. Some development environments do this automatically, but some don't. In that case, the program you are looking at in the text editor is not the same as the program you are running.

Debugging can take a long time if you keep running the same incorrect program over and over!

Make sure that the code you are looking at is the code you are running. If you're not sure, put something like `print("hello")` at the beginning of the program and run it again. If you don't see `hello`, you're not running the right program!

4.13 Glossary

algorithm A general process for solving a category of problems.

argument A value provided to a function when the function is called. This value is assigned to the corresponding parameter in the function.

body The sequence of statements inside a function definition.

composition Using an expression as part of a larger expression, or a statement as part of a larger statement.

deterministic Pertaining to a program that does the same thing each time it runs, given the same inputs.

dot notation The syntax for calling a function in another module by specifying the module name followed by a dot (period) and the function name.

flow of execution The order in which statements are executed during a program run.

fruitful function A function that returns a value.

function A named sequence of statements that performs some useful operation. Functions may or may not take arguments and may or may not produce a result.

function call A statement that executes a function. It consists of the function name followed by an argument list.

function definition A statement that creates a new function, specifying its name, parameters, and the statements it executes.

function object A value created by a function definition. The name of the function is a variable that refers to a function object.

header The first line of a function definition.

import statement A statement that reads a module file and creates a module object.

module object A value created by an `import` statement that provides access to the data and code defined in a module.

parameter A name used inside a function to refer to the value passed as an argument.

pseudorandom Pertaining to a sequence of numbers that appear to be random, but are generated by a deterministic program.

return value The result of a function. If a function call is used as an expression, the return value is the value of the expression.

void function A function that does not return a value.

4.14 Exercises

Exercise 4: What is the purpose of the “def” keyword in Python?

- a) It is slang that means “the following code is really cool”
- b) It indicates the start of a function
- c) It indicates that the following indented section of code is to be stored for later
- d) b and c are both true
- e) None of the above

Exercise 5: What will the following Python program print out?

```
def fred():
    print("Zap")

def jane():
    print("ABC")

jane()
fred()
jane()
```

- a) Zap ABC jane fred jane
- b) Zap ABC Zap
- c) ABC Zap jane
- d) ABC Zap ABC
- e) Zap Zap Zap

Exercise 6: Rewrite your pay computation with time-and-a-half for overtime and create a function called `compute_pay` which takes two parameters (`hours` and `rate`).

```
Enter Hours: 45
Enter Rate: 10
Pay: 475.0
```

Exercise 7: Rewrite the grade program from the previous chapter using a function called `compute_grade` that takes a score as its parameter and returns a grade as a string.

Score	Grade
>= 0.9	A
>= 0.8	B
>= 0.7	C
>= 0.6	D
< 0.6	F

```
Enter score: 0.95
A
```

```
Enter score: perfect
Bad score
```



```
Enter score: 10.0
Bad score
```

```
Enter score: 0.75
C
```

```
Enter score: 0.5
F
```

Run the program repeatedly to test the various different values for input.

Chapter 5

Iteration

5.1 Updating variables

A common pattern in assignment statements is an assignment statement that updates a variable, where the new value of the variable depends on the old.

```
x = x + 1
```

This means “get the current value of `x`, add 1, and then update `x` with the new value.”

If you try to update a variable that doesn’t exist, you get an error, because Python evaluates the right side before it assigns a value to `x`:

```
>>> x = x + 1
NameError: name 'x' is not defined
```

Before you can update a variable, you have to *initialize* it, usually with a simple assignment:

```
>>> x = 0
>>> x = x + 1
```

Updating a variable by adding 1 is called an *increment*; subtracting 1 is called a *decrement*.

5.2 The while statement

Computers are often used to automate repetitive tasks. Repeating identical or similar tasks without making errors is something that computers do well and people do poorly. Because iteration is so common, Python provides several language features to make it easier.

One form of iteration in Python is the `while` statement. Here is a simple program that counts down from five and then says “Blastoff!”.

```
n = 5
while n > 0:
    print(n)
    n = n - 1
print('Blastoff!')
```

You can almost read the **while** statement as if it were English. It means, “While **n** is greater than 0, display the value of **n** and then reduce the value of **n** by 1. When you get to 0, exit the **while** statement and display the word **Blastoff!**”

More formally, here is the flow of execution for a **while** statement:

1. Evaluate the condition, yielding **True** or **False**.
2. If the condition is false, exit the **while** statement and continue execution at the next statement.
3. If the condition is true, execute the body and then go back to step 1.

This type of flow is called a *loop* because the third step loops back around to the top. We call each time we execute the body of the loop an *iteration*. For the above loop, we would say, “It had five iterations”, which means that the body of the loop was executed five times.

The body of the loop should change the value of one or more variables so that eventually the condition becomes false and the loop terminates. We call the variable that changes each time the loop executes and controls when the loop finishes the *iteration variable*. If there is no iteration variable, the loop will repeat forever, resulting in an *infinite loop*.

5.3 Infinite loops

An endless source of amusement for programmers is the observation that the directions on shampoo, “Lather, rinse, repeat,” are an infinite loop because there is no *iteration variable* telling you how many times to execute the loop.

In the case of **countdown**, we can prove that the loop terminates because we know that the value of **n** is finite, and we can see that the value of **n** gets smaller each time through the loop, so eventually we have to get to 0. Other times a loop is obviously infinite because it has no iteration variable at all.

Sometimes you don’t know it’s time to end a loop until you get half way through the body. In that case you can write an infinite loop on purpose and then use the **break** statement to jump out of the loop.

This loop is obviously an *infinite loop* because the logical expression on the **while** statement is simply the logical constant **True**:

```
n = 10
while True:
    print(n, end=' ')
    n = n - 1
print('Done!')
```

If you make the mistake and run this code, you will learn quickly how to stop a runaway Python process on your system or find where the power-off button is on your computer. This program will run forever or until your battery runs out because the logical expression at the top of the loop is always true by virtue of the fact that the expression is the constant value `True`.

While this is a dysfunctional infinite loop, we can still use this pattern to build useful loops as long as we carefully add code to the body of the loop to explicitly exit the loop using `break` when we have reached the exit condition.

For example, suppose you want to take input from the user until they type `done`. You could write:

```
while True:
    line = input('> ')
    if line == 'done':
        break
    print(line)
print('Done!')
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/copytildone1.py>

The loop condition is `True`, which is always true, so the loop runs repeatedly until it hits the `break` statement.

Each time through, it prompts the user with an angle bracket. If the user types `done`, the `break` statement exits the loop. Otherwise the program echoes whatever the user types and goes back to the top of the loop. Here's a sample run:

```
> hello there
hello there
> finished
finished
> done
Done!
```

This way of writing `while` loops is common because you can check the condition anywhere in the loop (not just at the top) and you can express the stop condition affirmatively (“stop when this happens”) rather than negatively (“keep going until that happens.”).

5.4 Finishing iterations with `continue`

Sometimes you are in an iteration of a loop and want to finish the current iteration and immediately jump to the next iteration. In that case you can use the `continue` statement to skip to the next iteration without finishing the body of the loop for the current iteration.

Here is an example of a loop that copies its input until the user types “done”, but treats lines that start with the hash character as lines not to be printed (kind of like Python comments).

```

while True:
    line = input('> ')
    if line[0] == '#':
        continue
    if line == 'done':
        break
    print(line)
print('Done!')

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/copytildone2.py

```

Here is a sample run of this new program with `continue` added.

```

> hello there
hello there
> # don't print this
> print this!
print this!
> done
Done!

```

All the lines are printed except the one that starts with the hash sign because when the `continue` is executed, it ends the current iteration and jumps back to the `while` statement to start the next iteration, thus skipping the `print` statement.

5.5 Definite loops using `for`

Sometimes we want to loop through a *set* of things such as a list of words, the lines in a file, or a list of numbers. When we have a list of things to loop through, we can construct a *definite* loop using a `for` statement. We call the `while` statement an *indefinite* loop because it simply loops until some condition becomes `False`, whereas the `for` loop is looping through a known set of items so it runs through as many iterations as there are items in the set.

The syntax of a `for` loop is similar to the `while` loop in that there is a `for` statement and a loop body:

```

friends = ['Joseph', 'Glenn', 'Sally']
for friend in friends:
    print('Happy New Year:', friend)
print('Done!')

```

In Python terms, the variable `friends` is a list¹ of three strings and the `for` loop goes through the list and executes the body once for each of the three strings in the list resulting in this output:

¹We will examine lists in more detail in a later chapter.

```
Happy New Year: Joseph
Happy New Year: Glenn
Happy New Year: Sally
Done!
```

Translating this `for` loop to English is not as direct as the `while`, but if you think of friends as a *set*, it goes like this: “Run the statements in the body of the `for` loop once for each friend *in* the set named `friends`.”

Looking at the `for` loop, *for* and *in* are reserved Python keywords, and `friend` and `friends` are variables.

```
for friend in friends:
    print('Happy New Year:', friend)
```

In particular, `friend` is the *iteration variable* for the `for` loop. The variable `friend` changes for each iteration of the loop and controls when the `for` loop completes. The *iteration variable* steps successively through the three strings stored in the `friends` variable.

5.6 Loop patterns

Often we use a `for` or `while` loop to go through a list of items or the contents of a file and we are looking for something such as the largest or smallest value of the data we scan through.

These loops are generally constructed by:

- Initializing one or more variables before the loop starts
- Performing some computation on each item in the loop body, possibly changing the variables in the body of the loop
- Looking at the resulting variables when the loop completes

We will use a list of numbers to demonstrate the concepts and construction of these loop patterns.

5.6.1 Counting and summing loops

For example, to count the number of items in a list, we would write the following `for` loop:

```
count = 0
for intervar in [3, 41, 12, 9, 74, 15]:
    count = count + 1
print('Count: ', count)
```

We set the variable `count` to zero before the loop starts, then we write a `for` loop to run through the list of numbers. Our *iteration* variable is named `itervar` and while we do not use `itervar` in the loop, it does control the loop and cause the loop body to be executed once for each of the values in the list.

In the body of the loop, we add 1 to the current value of `count` for each of the values in the list. While the loop is executing, the value of `count` is the number of values we have seen “so far”.

Once the loop completes, the value of `count` is the total number of items. The total number “falls in our lap” at the end of the loop. We construct the loop so that we have what we want when the loop finishes.

Another similar loop that computes the total of a set of numbers is as follows:

```
total = 0
for itervar in [3, 41, 12, 9, 74, 15]:
    total = total + itervar
print('Total: ', total)
```

In this loop we *do* use the *iteration variable*. Instead of simply adding one to the `count` as in the previous loop, we add the actual number (3, 41, 12, etc.) to the running total during each loop iteration. If you think about the variable `total`, it contains the “running total of the values so far”. So before the loop starts `total` is zero because we have not yet seen any values, during the loop `total` is the running total, and at the end of the loop `total` is the overall total of all the values in the list.

As the loop executes, `total` accumulates the sum of the elements; a variable used this way is sometimes called an *accumulator*.

Neither the counting loop nor the summing loop are particularly useful in practice because there are built-in functions `len()` and `sum()` that compute the number of items in a list and the total of the items in the list respectively.

5.6.2 Maximum and minimum loops

To find the largest value in a list or sequence, we construct the following loop:

```
largest = None
print('Before:', largest)
for itervar in [3, 41, 12, 9, 74, 15]:
    if largest is None or itervar > largest :
        largest = itervar
    print('Loop:', itervar, largest)
print('Largest:', largest)
```

When the program executes, the output is as follows:

```
Before: None
Loop: 3 3
```



```

Loop: 41 41
Loop: 12 41
Loop: 9 41
Loop: 74 74
Loop: 15 74
Largest: 74

```

The variable `largest` is best thought of as the “largest value we have seen so far”. Before the loop, we set `largest` to the constant `None`. `None` is a special constant value which we can store in a variable to mark the variable as “empty”.

Before the loop starts, the largest value we have seen so far is `None` since we have not yet seen any values. While the loop is executing, if `largest` is `None` then we take the first value we see as the largest so far. You can see in the first iteration when the value of `itervar` is 3, since `largest` is `None`, we immediately set `largest` to be 3.

After the first iteration, `largest` is no longer `None`, so the second part of the compound logical expression that checks `itervar > largest` triggers only when we see a value that is larger than the “largest so far”. When we see a new “even larger” value we take that new value for `largest`. You can see in the program output that `largest` progresses from 3 to 41 to 74.

At the end of the loop, we have scanned all of the values and the variable `largest` now does contain the largest value in the list.

To compute the smallest number, the code is very similar with one small change:

```

smallest = None
print('Before:', smallest)
for itervar in [3, 41, 12, 9, 74, 15]:
    if smallest is None or itervar < smallest:
        smallest = itervar
    print('Loop:', itervar, smallest)
print('Smallest:', smallest)

```

Again, `smallest` is the “smallest so far” before, during, and after the loop executes. When the loop has completed, `smallest` contains the minimum value in the list.

Again as in counting and summing, the built-in functions `max()` and `min()` make writing these exact loops unnecessary.

The following is a simple version of the Python built-in `min()` function:

```

def min(values):
    smallest = None
    for value in values:
        if smallest is None or value < smallest:
            smallest = value
    return smallest

```

In the function version of the smallest code, we removed all of the `print` statements so as to be equivalent to the `min` function which is already built in to Python.

5.7 Debugging

As you start writing bigger programs, you might find yourself spending more time debugging. More code means more chances to make an error and more places for bugs to hide.

One way to cut your debugging time is “debugging by bisection.” For example, if there are 100 lines in your program and you check them one at a time, it would take 100 steps.

Instead, try to break the problem in half. Look at the middle of the program, or near it, for an intermediate value you can check. Add a `print` statement (or something else that has a verifiable effect) and run the program.

If the mid-point check is incorrect, the problem must be in the first half of the program. If it is correct, the problem is in the second half.

Every time you perform a check like this, you halve the number of lines you have to search. After six steps (which is much less than 100), you would be down to one or two lines of code, at least in theory.

In practice it is not always clear what the “middle of the program” is and not always possible to check it. It doesn’t make sense to count lines and find the exact midpoint. Instead, think about places in the program where there might be errors and places where it is easy to put a check. Then choose a spot where you think the chances are about the same that the bug is before or after the check.

5.8 Glossary

accumulator A variable used in a loop to add up or accumulate a result.

counter A variable used in a loop to count the number of times something happened. We initialize a counter to zero and then increment the counter each time we want to “count” something.

decrement An update that decreases the value of a variable.

initialize An assignment that gives an initial value to a variable that will be updated.

increment An update that increases the value of a variable (often by one).

infinite loop A loop in which the terminating condition is never satisfied or for which there is no terminating condition.

iteration Repeated execution of a set of statements using either a function that calls itself or a loop.

5.9 Exercises

Exercise 1: Write a program which repeatedly reads integers until the user enters “done”. Once “done” is entered, print out the total, count, and average of the integers. If the user enters anything other than a integers, detect their mistake using `try` and `except` and print an error message and skip to the next integers.

```
Enter a number: 4
Enter a number: 5
Enter a number: bad data
Invalid input
Enter a number: 7
Enter a number: done
16 3 5.333333333333333
```

Exercise 2: Write another program that prompts for a list of numbers as above and at the end prints out both the maximum and minimum of the numbers instead of the average.

Chapter 6

Strings

6.1 A string is a sequence

A string is a *sequence* of characters. You can access the characters one at a time with the bracket operator:

```
>>> fruit = 'banana'
>>> letter = fruit[1]
```

The second statement extracts the character at index position 1 from the `fruit` variable and assigns it to the `letter` variable.

The expression in brackets is called an *index*. The index indicates which character in the sequence you want (hence the name).

But you might not get what you expect:

```
>>> print(letter)
a
```

For most people, the first letter of “banana” is “b”, not “a”. But in Python, the index is an offset from the beginning of the string, and the offset of the first letter is zero.

```
>>> letter = fruit[0]
>>> print(letter)
b
```

So “b” is the 0th letter (“zero-th”) of “banana”, “a” is the 1th letter (“one-th”), and “n” is the 2th (“two-th”) letter.

You can use any expression, including variables and operators, as an index, but the value of the index has to be an integer. Otherwise you get:

```
>>> letter = fruit[1.5]
TypeError: string indices must be integers
```



Figure 6.1: String Indexes

6.2 Getting the length of a string using `len`

`len` is a built-in function that returns the number of characters in a string:

```
>>> fruit = 'banana'
>>> len(fruit)
6
```

To get the last letter of a string, you might be tempted to try something like this:

```
>>> length = len(fruit)
>>> last = fruit[length]
IndexError: string index out of range
```

The reason for the `IndexError` is that there is no letter in “banana” with the index 6. Since we started counting at zero, the six letters are numbered 0 to 5. To get the last character, you have to subtract 1 from `length`:

```
>>> last = fruit[length-1]
>>> print(last)
a
```

Alternatively, you can use negative indices, which count backward from the end of the string. The expression `fruit[-1]` yields the last letter, `fruit[-2]` yields the second to last, and so on.

6.3 Traversal through a string with a loop

A lot of computations involve processing a string one character at a time. Often they start at the beginning, select each character in turn, do something to it, and continue until the end. This pattern of processing is called a *traversal*. One way to write a traversal is with a `while` loop:

```
index = 0
while index < len(fruit):
    letter = fruit[index]
    print(letter)
    index = index + 1
```

This loop traverses the string and displays each letter on a line by itself. The loop condition is `index < len(fruit)`, so when `index` is equal to the length of the string, the condition is false, and the body of the loop is not executed. The last character accessed is the one with the index `len(fruit)-1`, which is the last character in the string.

Exercise 1: Write a `while` loop that starts at the last character in the string and works its way backwards to the first character in the string, printing each letter on a separate line, except backwards.

Another way to write a traversal is with a `for` loop:

```
for char in fruit:
    print(char)
```

Each time through the loop, the next character in the string is assigned to the variable `char`. The loop continues until no characters are left.

6.4 String slices

A segment of a string is called a *slice*. Selecting a slice is similar to selecting a character:

```
>>> s = 'Monty Python'
>>> print(s[0:5])
Monty
>>> print(s[6:12])
Python
```

The operator `[n:m]` returns the part of the string from the “n-th” character to the “m-th” character, including the first but excluding the last.

If you omit the first index (before the colon), the slice starts at the beginning of the string. If you omit the second index, the slice goes to the end of the string:

```
>>> fruit = 'banana'
>>> fruit[:3]
'ban'
>>> fruit[3:]
'ana'
```

If the first index is greater than or equal to the second the result is an *empty string*, represented by two quotation marks:

```
>>> fruit = 'banana'
>>> fruit[3:3]
''
```

An empty string contains no characters and has length 0, but other than that, it is the same as any other string.

Exercise 2: Given that `fruit` is a string, what does `fruit[:]` mean?

6.5 Strings are immutable

It is tempting to use the operator on the left side of an assignment, with the intention of changing a character in a string. For example:

```
>>> greeting = 'Hello, world!'
>>> greeting[0] = 'J'
TypeError: 'str' object does not support item assignment
```

The “object” in this case is the string and the “item” is the character you tried to assign. For now, an *object* is the same thing as a value, but we will refine that definition later. An *item* is one of the values in a sequence.

The reason for the error is that strings are *immutable*, which means you can’t change an existing string. The best you can do is create a new string that is a variation on the original:

```
>>> greeting = 'Hello, world!'
>>> new_greeting = 'J' + greeting[1:]
>>> print(new_greeting)
Jello, world!
```

This example concatenates a new first letter onto a slice of `greeting`. It has no effect on the original string.

6.6 Looping and counting

The following program counts the number of times the letter “a” appears in a string:

```
word = 'banana'
count = 0
for letter in word:
    if letter == 'a':
        count = count + 1
print(count)
```

This program demonstrates another pattern of computation called a *counter*. The variable `count` is initialized to 0 and then incremented each time an “a” is found. When the loop exits, `count` contains the result: the total number of a’s.

Exercise 3: Encapsulate this code in a function named `count`, and generalize it so that it accepts the string and the letter as arguments.

6.7 The in operator

The word `in` is a boolean operator that takes two strings and returns `True` if the first appears as a substring in the second:

```
>>> 'a' in 'banana'
True
>>> 'seed' in 'banana'
False
```

6.8 String comparison

The comparison operators work on strings. To see if two strings are equal:

```
if word == 'banana':
    print('All right, bananas.')
```

Other comparison operations are useful for putting words in alphabetical order:

```
if word < 'banana':
    print('Your word,' + word + ', comes before banana.')
elif word > 'banana':
    print('Your word,' + word + ', comes after banana.')
else:
    print('All right, bananas.')
```

Python does not handle uppercase and lowercase letters the same way that people do. All the uppercase letters come before all the lowercase letters, so:

```
Your word, Pineapple, comes before banana.
```

A common way to address this problem is to convert strings to a standard format, such as all lowercase, before performing the comparison. Keep that in mind in case you have to defend yourself against a man armed with a Pineapple.

6.9 String methods

Strings are an example of Python *objects*. An object contains both data (the actual string itself) and *methods*, which are effectively functions that are built into the object and are available to any *instance* of the object.

Python has a function called `dir` which lists the methods available for an object. The `type` function shows the type of an object and the `dir` function shows the available methods.

```

>>> stuff = 'Hello world'
>>> type(stuff)
<class 'str'>
>>> dir(stuff)
[... 'capitalize', 'casefold', 'center', 'count', 'encode',
'endswith', 'expandtabs', 'find', 'format', 'format_map',
'index', 'isalnum', 'isalpha', 'isdecimal', 'isdigit',
'identifier', 'islower', 'isnumeric', 'isprintable',
'isspace', 'istitle', 'isupper', 'join', 'ljust', 'lower',
'lstrip', 'maketrans', 'partition', 'replace', 'rfind',
'rindex', 'rjust', 'rpartition', 'rsplit', 'rstrip',
'split', 'splitlines', 'startswith', 'strip', 'swapcase',
'title', 'translate', 'upper', 'zfill']
>>> help(str.capitalize)
Help on method_descriptor:

capitalize(self, /)
    Return a capitalized version of the string.

    More specifically, make the first character have upper
    case and the rest lower case.
>>>

```

While the `dir` function lists the methods, and you can use `help` to get some simple documentation on a method, a better source of documentation for string methods would be

<https://docs.python.org/library/stdtypes.html#string-methods>.

Calling a *method* is similar to calling a function (it takes arguments and returns a value) but the syntax is different. We call a method by appending the method name to the variable name using the period as a delimiter.

For example, the method `upper` takes a string and returns a new string with all uppercase letters:

Instead of the function syntax `upper(word)`, it uses the method syntax `word.upper()`.

```

>>> word = 'banana'
>>> new_word = word.upper()
>>> print(new_word)
BANANA

```

This form of dot notation specifies the name of the method, `upper`, and the name of the string to apply the method to, `word`. The empty parentheses indicate that this method takes no argument.

A method call is called an *invocation*; in this case, we would say that we are invoking `upper` on the `word`.

For example, there is a string method named `find` that searches for the position of one string within another:

```
>>> word = 'banana'
>>> index = word.find('a')
>>> print(index)
1
```

In this example, we invoke `find` on `word` and pass the letter we are looking for as a parameter.

The `find` method can find substrings as well as characters:

```
>>> word.find('na')
2
```

It can take as a second argument the index where it should start:

```
>>> word.find('na', 3)
4
```

One common task is to remove white space (spaces, tabs, or newlines) from the beginning and end of a string using the `strip` method:

```
>>> line = '  Here we go  '
>>> line.strip()
'Here we go'
```

Some methods such as `startswith` return boolean values.

```
>>> line = 'Have a nice day'
>>> line.startswith('Have')
True
>>> line.startswith('h')
False
```

You will note that `startswith` requires case to match, so sometimes we take a line and map it all to lowercase before we do any checking using the `lower` method.

```
>>> line = 'Have a nice day'
>>> line.startswith('h')
False
>>> line.lower()
'have a nice day'
>>> line.lower().startswith('h')
True
```

In the last example, the method `lower` is called and then we use `startswith` to see if the resulting lowercase string starts with the letter “h”. As long as we are careful with the order, we can make multiple method calls in a single expression.

Exercise 4: There is a string method called `count` that is similar to the function in the previous exercise. Read the documentation of this method at:

<https://docs.python.org/library/stdtypes.html#string-methods>

Write an invocation that counts the number of times the letter a occurs in “banana”.

6.10 Parsing strings

Often, we want to look into a string and find a substring. For example if we were presented a series of lines formatted as follows:

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
```

and we wanted to pull out only the second half of the address (i.e., `uct.ac.za`) from each line, we can do this by using the `find` method and string slicing.

First, we will find the position of the at-sign in the string. Then we will find the position of the first space *after* the at-sign. And then we will use string slicing to extract the portion of the string which we are looking for.

```
>>> data = 'From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008'
>>> atpos = data.find('@')
>>> print(atpos)
21
>>> spos = data.find(' ',atpos)
>>> print(spos)
31
>>> host = data[atpos+1:spos]
>>> print(host)
uct.ac.za
>>>
```

We use a version of the `find` method which allows us to specify a position in the string where we want `find` to start looking. When we slice, we extract the characters from “one beyond the at-sign through up to *but not including* the space character”.

The documentation for the `find` method is available at

<https://docs.python.org/library/stdtypes.html#string-methods>.

6.11 Formatted String Literals

A formatted string literal (often referred to simply as an f-string) allows Python expressions to be used within string literals. This is accomplished by prepending an `f` to the string literal and enclosing expressions in curly braces `{}`.

For example, wrapping a variable name in curly braces inside an f-string will cause it to be replaced by its value:

```
>>> camels = 42
>>> f'{camels}'
'42'
```

The result is the string `'42'`, which is not to be confused with the integer value 42.

An expression can appear anywhere in the string, so you can embed a value in a sentence:

```
>>> camels = 42
>>> f'I have spotted {camels} camels.'
'I have spotted 42 camels.'
```

Several expressions can be included within a single string literal in order to create more complex strings.

```
>>> years = 3
>>> count = .1
>>> species = 'camels'
>>> f'In {years} years I have spotted {count} {species}.'
'In 3 years I have spotted 0.1 camels.'
```

Formatted string literals are powerful, and they can do even more than is covered here. You can read more about them at

<https://docs.python.org/3/tutorial/inputoutput.html#formatted-string-literals>.

6.12 Debugging

A skill that you should cultivate as you program is always asking yourself, “What could go wrong here?” or alternatively, “What crazy thing might our user do to crash our (seemingly) perfect program?”

For example, look at the program which we used to demonstrate the `while` loop in the chapter on iteration:

```
while True:
    line = input('> ')
    if line[0] == '#':
        continue
    if line == 'done':
        break
    print(line)
print('Done!')
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/copytildone2.py>

Look what happens when the user enters an empty line of input:

```
> hello there
hello there
> # don't print this
> print this!
print this!
>
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "copytildone.py", line 3, in <module>
    if line[0] == '#':
IndexError: string index out of range
```

The code works fine until it is presented an empty line. Then there is no zero-th character, so we get a traceback. There are two solutions to this to make line three “safe” even if the line is empty.

One possibility is to simply use the `startswith` method which returns `False` if the string is empty.

```
if line.startswith('#):
```

Another way is to safely write the `if` statement using the *guardian* pattern and make sure the second logical expression is evaluated only where there is at least one character in the string:

```
if len(line) > 0 and line[0] == '#':
```

6.13 Glossary

counter A variable used to count something, usually initialized to zero and then incremented.

empty string A string with no characters and length 0, represented by two quotation marks.

flag A boolean variable used to indicate whether a condition is true or false.

invocation A statement that calls a method.

immutable The property of a sequence whose items cannot be assigned.

index An integer value used to select an item in a sequence, such as a character in a string.

item One of the values in a sequence.

method A function that is associated with an object and called using dot notation.

object Something a variable can refer to. For now, you can use “object” and “value” interchangeably.

search A pattern of traversal that stops when it finds what it is looking for.

sequence An ordered set; that is, a set of values where each value is identified by an integer index.

slice A part of a string specified by a range of indices.

traverse To iterate through the items in a sequence, performing a similar operation on each.

6.14 Exercises

Exercise 5: Slicing strings

Take the following Python code that stores a string:

```
str = 'X-DSPAM-Confidence: 0.8475'
```

Use `find` and string slicing to extract the portion of the string after the colon character and then use the `float` function to convert the extracted string into a floating point number.

Exercise 6: String methods

Read the documentation of the string methods at

<https://docs.python.org/library/stdtypes.html#string-methods>.

You might want to experiment with some of them to make sure you understand how they work. `strip` and `replace` are particularly useful.

The documentation uses a syntax that might be confusing. For example, in `find(sub[, start[, end]])`, the brackets indicate optional arguments. So `sub` is required, but `start` is optional, and if you include `start`, then `end` is optional.

Chapter 7

Files

7.1 Persistence

So far, we have learned how to write programs and communicate our intentions to the *Central Processing Unit* using conditional execution, functions, and iterations. We have learned how to create and use data structures in the *Main Memory*. The CPU and memory are where our software works and runs. It is where all of the “thinking” happens.

But if you recall from our hardware architecture discussions, once the power is turned off, anything stored in either the CPU or main memory is erased. So up to now, our programs have just been transient fun exercises to learn Python.

In this chapter, we start to work with *Secondary Memory* (or files). Secondary memory is not erased when the power is turned off. Or in the case of a USB flash drive, the data we write from our programs can be removed from the system and transported to another system.

We will primarily focus on reading and writing text files such as those we create in a text editor. Later we will see how to work with database files which are binary files, specifically designed to be read and written through database software.

7.2 Opening files

When we want to read or write a file (say on your hard drive), we first must *open* the file. Opening the file communicates with your operating system, which knows where the data for each file is stored. When you open a file, you are asking the operating system to find the file by name and make sure the file exists. In this example, we open the file *mbbox.txt*, which should be stored in the same folder that you are in when you start Python. You can download this file from www.py4e.com/code3/mbbox.txt

```
>>> fhand = open('mbbox.txt')
>>> print(fhand)
<_io.TextIOWrapper name='mbbox.txt' mode='r' encoding='cp1252'>
```

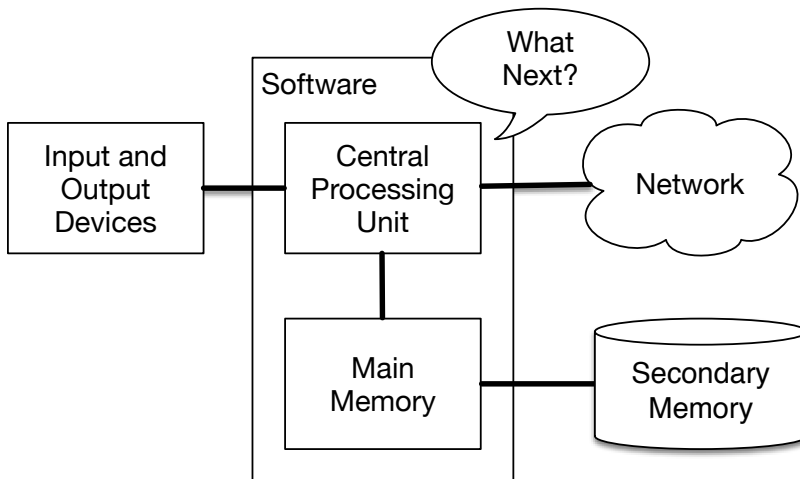


Figure 7.1: Secondary Memory

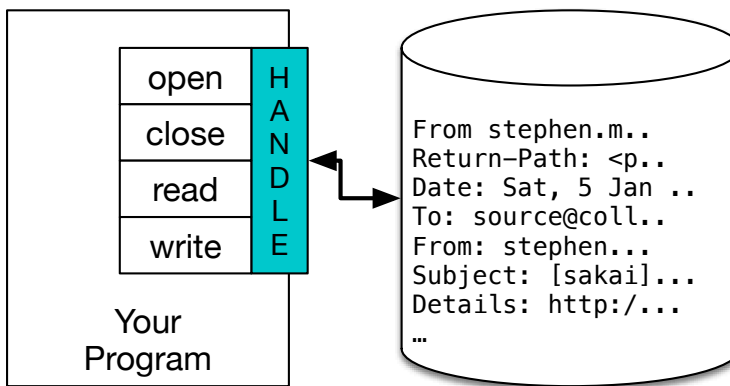


Figure 7.2: A File Handle

If the `open` is successful, the operating system returns us a *file handle*. The file handle is not the actual data contained in the file, but instead it is a “handle” that we can use to read the data. You are given a handle if the requested file exists and you have the proper permissions to read the file.

If the file does not exist, `open` will fail with a traceback and you will not get a handle to access the contents of the file:

```
>>> fhand = open('stuff.txt')
Traceback (most recent call last):
File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
FileNotFoundError: [Errno 2] No such file or directory: 'stuff.txt'
```

Later we will use `try` and `except` to deal more gracefully with the situation where we attempt to open a file that does not exist.

7.3 Text files and lines

A text file can be thought of as a sequence of lines, much like a Python string can be thought of as a sequence of characters. For example, this is a sample of a text file which records mail activity from various individuals in an open source project development team:

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
Return-Path: <postmaster@collab.sakaiproject.org>
Date: Sat, 5 Jan 2008 09:12:18 -0500
To: source@collab.sakaiproject.org
From: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za
Subject: [sakai] svn commit: r39772 - content/branches/
Details: http://source.sakaiproject.org/viewsvn/?view=rev&rev=39772
...
```

The entire file of mail interactions is available from

www.py4e.com/code3/mbox.txt

and a shortened version of the file is available from

www.py4e.com/code3/mbox-short.txt

These files are in a standard format for a file containing multiple mail messages. The lines which start with “From” separate the messages and the lines which start with “From:” are part of the messages. For more information about the mbox format, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mbox>.

To break the file into lines, there is a special character that represents the “end of the line” called the *newline* character.

In Python, we represent the *newline* character as a backslash-n in string constants. Even though this looks like two characters, it is actually a single character. When we look at the variable by entering “stuff” in the interpreter, it shows us the `\n` in the string, but when we use `print` to show the string, we see the string broken into two lines by the newline character.

```
>>> stuff = 'Hello\nWorld!'
>>> stuff
'Hello\nWorld!'
>>> print(stuff)
Hello
World!
>>> stuff = 'X\nY'
>>> print(stuff)
X
Y
>>> len(stuff)
3
```

You can also see that the length of the string `X\nY` is *three* characters because the newline character is a single character.

So when we look at the lines in a file, we need to *imagine* that there is a special invisible character called the newline at the end of each line that marks the end of the line.

So the newline character separates the characters in the file into lines.

7.4 Reading files

While the *file handle* does not contain the data for the file, it is quite easy to construct a **for** loop to read through and count each of the lines in a file:

```
fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
count = 0
for line in fhand:
    count = count + 1
print('Line Count:', count)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/open.py
```

We can use the file handle as the sequence in our **for** loop. Our **for** loop simply counts the number of lines in the file and prints them out. The rough translation of the **for** loop into English is, “for each line in the file represented by the file handle, add one to the **count** variable.”

The reason that the **open** function does not read the entire file is that the file might be quite large with many gigabytes of data. The **open** statement takes the same amount of time regardless of the size of the file. The **for** loop actually causes the data to be read from the file.

When the file is read using a **for** loop in this manner, Python takes care of splitting the data in the file into separate lines using the newline character. Python reads each line through the newline and includes the newline as the last character in the **line** variable for each iteration of the **for** loop.

Because the **for** loop reads the data one line at a time, it can efficiently read and count the lines in very large files without running out of main memory to store the data. The above program can count the lines in any size file using very little memory since each line is read, counted, and then discarded.

If you know the file is relatively small compared to the size of your main memory, you can read the whole file into one string using the **read** method on the file handle.

```
>>> fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
>>> inp = fhand.read()
>>> print(len(inp))
94626
>>> print(inp[:20])
From stephen.marquar
```

In this example, the entire contents (all 94,626 characters) of the file *mbox-short.txt* are read directly into the variable **inp**. We use string slicing to print out the first 20 characters of the string data stored in **inp**.

When the file is read in this manner, all the characters including all of the lines and newline characters are one big string in the variable `inp`. It is a good idea to store the output of `read` as a variable because each call to `read` exhausts the resource:

```
>>> fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
>>> print(len(fhand.read()))
94626
>>> print(len(fhand.read()))
0
```

Remember that this form of the `open` function should only be used if the file data will fit comfortably in the main memory of your computer. If the file is too large to fit in main memory, you should write your program to read the file in chunks using a `for` or `while` loop.

7.5 Searching through a file

When you are searching through data in a file, it is a very common pattern to read through a file, ignoring most of the lines and only processing lines which meet a particular condition. We can combine the pattern for reading a file with string methods to build simple search mechanisms.

For example, if we wanted to read a file and only print out lines which started with the prefix “From:”, we could use the string method *startswith* to select only those lines with the desired prefix:

```
fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in fhand:
    if line.startswith('From:'):
        print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/search1.py
```

When this program runs, we get the following output:

```
From: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za

From: louis@media.berkeley.edu

From: zqian@umich.edu

From: rjlowe@iupui.edu
...
```

The output looks great since the only lines we are seeing are those which start with “From:”, but why are we seeing the extra blank lines? This is due to that invisible *newline* character. Each of the lines ends with a newline, so the `print` statement

prints the string in the variable *line* which includes a newline and then `print` adds *another* newline, resulting in the double spacing effect we see.

We could use line slicing to print all but the last character, but a simpler approach is to use the *rstrip* method which strips whitespaces from the right side of a string as follows:

```
fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in fhand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    if line.startswith('From:'):
        print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/search2.py
```

When this program runs, we get the following output:

```
From: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za
From: louis@media.berkeley.edu
From: zqian@umich.edu
From: rjlowe@iupui.edu
From: zqian@umich.edu
From: rjlowe@iupui.edu
From: cwen@iupui.edu
...
```

As your file processing programs get more complicated, you may want to structure your search loops using `continue`. The basic idea of the search loop is that you are looking for “interesting” lines and effectively skipping “uninteresting” lines. And then when we find an interesting line, we do something with that line.

We can structure the loop to follow the pattern of skipping uninteresting lines as follows:

```
fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in fhand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    # Skip 'uninteresting lines'
    if not line.startswith('From:'):
        continue
    # Process our 'interesting' line
    print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/search3.py
```

The output of the program is the same. In English, the uninteresting lines are those which do not start with “From:”, which we skip using `continue`. For the “interesting” lines (i.e., those that start with “From:”) we perform the processing.

We can use the `find` string method to simulate a text editor search that finds lines where the search string is anywhere in the line. Since `find` looks for an occurrence

of a string within another string and either returns the position of the string or -1 if the string was not found, we can write the following loop to show lines which contain the string “@uct.ac.za” (i.e., they come from the University of Cape Town in South Africa):

```
fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in fhand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    if line.find('@uct.ac.za') == -1: continue
    print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/search4.py
```

Which produces the following output:

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan  5 09:14:16 2008
X-Authentication-Warning: set sender to stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za using -f
From: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za
Author: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za
From david.horwitz@uct.ac.za Fri Jan  4 07:02:32 2008
X-Authentication-Warning: set sender to david.horwitz@uct.ac.za using -f
From: david.horwitz@uct.ac.za
Author: david.horwitz@uct.ac.za
...
```

Here we also use the contracted form of the if statement where we put the `continue` on the same line as the if. This contracted form of the if functions the same as if the `continue` were on the next line and indented.

7.6 Letting the user choose the file name

We really do not want to have to edit our Python code every time we want to process a different file. It would be more usable to ask the user to enter the file name string each time the program runs so they can use our program on different files without changing the Python code.

This is quite simple to do by reading the file name from the user using `input` as follows:

```
fname = input('Enter the file name: ')
fhand = open(fname)
count = 0
for line in fhand:
    if line.startswith('Subject:'):
        count = count + 1
print('There were', count, 'subject lines in', fname)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/search6.py
```

We read the file name from the user and place it in a variable named `fname` and open that file. Now we can run the program repeatedly on different files.

```
python search6.py
Enter the file name: mbox.txt
There were 1797 subject lines in mbox.txt

python search6.py
Enter the file name: mbox-short.txt
There were 27 subject lines in mbox-short.txt
```

Before peeking at the next section, take a look at the above program and ask yourself, “What could go possibly wrong here?” or “What might our friendly user do that would cause our nice little program to ungracefully exit with a traceback, making us look not-so-cool in the eyes of our users?”

7.7 Using `try`, `except`, and `open`

I told you not to peek. This is your last chance.

What if our user types something that is not a file name?

```
python search6.py
Enter the file name: missing.txt
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "search6.py", line 2, in <module>
    fhand = open(fname)
FileNotFoundError: [Errno 2] No such file or directory: 'missing.txt'

python search6.py
Enter the file name: na na boo boo
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "search6.py", line 2, in <module>
    fhand = open(fname)
FileNotFoundError: [Errno 2] No such file or directory: 'na na boo boo'
```

Do not laugh. Users will eventually do every possible thing they can do to break your programs, either mistakenly or with malicious intent. As a matter of fact, an important part of any software development team is a person or group called *Quality Assurance* (or QA for short) whose very job it is to do the craziest things possible in an attempt to break the software that the programmer has created.

The QA team is responsible for finding the flaws in programs before we have delivered the program to the end users who may be purchasing the software or paying our salary to write the software. So the QA team is the programmer’s best friend.

So now that we see the flaw in the program, we can elegantly fix it using the `try/except` structure. We need to assume that the `open` call might fail and add recovery code when the `open` fails as follows:


```

fname = input('Enter the file name: ')
try:
    fhand = open(fname)
except:
    print('File cannot be opened:', fname)
    exit()
count = 0
for line in fhand:
    if line.startswith('Subject:'):
        count = count + 1
print('There were', count, 'subject lines in', fname)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/search7.py

```

The `exit` function terminates the program. It is a function that we call that never returns. Now when our user (or QA team) types in silliness or bad file names, we “catch” them and recover gracefully:

```

python search7.py
Enter the file name: mbox.txt
There were 1797 subject lines in mbox.txt

python search7.py
Enter the file name: na na boo boo
File cannot be opened: na na boo boo

```

Protecting the `open` call is a good example of the proper use of `try` and `except` in a Python program. We use the term “Pythonic” when we are doing something the “Python way”. We might say that the above example is the Pythonic way to open a file.

Once you become more skilled in Python, you can engage in repartee with other Python programmers to decide which of two equivalent solutions to a problem is “more Pythonic”. The goal to be “more Pythonic” captures the notion that programming is part engineering and part art. We are not always interested in just making something work, we also want our solution to be elegant and to be appreciated as elegant by our peers.

7.8 Writing files

To write a file, you have to open it with mode “w” as a second parameter:

```

>>> fout = open('output.txt', 'w')
>>> print(fout)
<_io.TextIOWrapper name='output.txt' mode='w' encoding='cp1252'>

```

If the file already exists, opening it in write mode clears out the old data and starts fresh, so be careful! If the file doesn’t exist, a new one is created.

The `write` method of the file handle object puts data into the file, returning the number of characters written. The default write mode is text for writing (and reading) strings.

```
>>> line1 = "This here's the wattle,\n"
>>> fout.write(line1)
24
```

Again, the file object keeps track of where it is, so if you call `write` again, it adds the new data to the end.

We must make sure to manage the ends of lines as we write to the file by explicitly inserting the newline character when we want to end a line. The `print` statement automatically appends a newline, but the `write` method does not add the newline automatically.

```
>>> line2 = 'the emblem of our land.\n'
>>> fout.write(line2)
24
```

When you are done writing, you have to close the file to make sure that the last bit of data is physically written to the disk so it will not be lost if the power goes off.

```
>>> fout.close()
```

We could close the files which we open for read as well, but we can be a little sloppy if we are only opening a few files since Python makes sure that all open files are closed when the program ends. When we are writing files, we want to explicitly close the files so as to leave nothing to chance.

7.9 Debugging

When you are reading and writing files, you might run into problems with whitespace. These errors can be hard to debug because spaces, tabs, and newlines are normally invisible:

```
>>> s = '1 2\t 3\n 4'
>>> print(s)
1 2 3
4
```

The built-in function `repr` can help. It takes any object as an argument and returns a string representation of the object. For strings, it represents whitespace characters with backslash sequences:

```
>>> print(repr(s))
'1 2\t 3\n 4'
```

This can be helpful for debugging.

One other problem you might run into is that different systems use different characters to indicate the end of a line. Some systems use a newline, represented `\n`. Others use a return character, represented `\r`. Some use both. If you move files between different systems, these inconsistencies might cause problems.

For most systems, there are applications to convert from one format to another. You can find them (and read more about this issue) at <https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newline>. Or, of course, you could write one yourself.

7.10 Glossary

catch To prevent an exception from terminating a program using the `try` and `except` statements.

newline A special character used in files and strings to indicate the end of a line.

Pythonic A technique that works elegantly in Python. “Using `try` and `except` is the *Pythonic* way to recover from missing files”.

Quality Assurance A person or team focused on insuring the overall quality of a software product. QA is often involved in testing a product and identifying problems before the product is released.

text file A sequence of characters stored in permanent storage like a hard drive.

7.11 Exercises

Exercise 1: Write a program to read through a file and print the contents of the file (line by line) all in upper case. Executing the program will look as follows:

```
python shout.py
Enter a file name: mbox-short.txt
FROM STEPHEN.MARQUARD@UCT.AC.ZA SAT JAN  5 09:14:16 2008
RETURN-PATH: <POSTMASTER@COLLAB.SAKAIPROJECT.ORG>
RECEIVED: FROM MURDER (MAIL.UMICH.EDU [141.211.14.90])
          BY FRANKENSTEIN.MAIL.UMICH.EDU (CYRUS V2.3.8) WITH LMTPA;
SAT, 05 JAN 2008 09:14:16 -0500
```

You can download the file from www.py4e.com/code3/mbox-short.txt

Exercise 2: Write a program to prompt for a file name, and then read through the file and look for lines of the form:

```
X-DSPAM-Confidence: 0.8475
```

When you encounter a line that starts with “X-DSPAM-Confidence:” pull apart the line to extract the floating-point number on the line. Count these lines and then compute the total of the spam confidence values from these lines. When you reach the end of the file, print out the average spam confidence.

```
Enter the file name: mbox.txt
Average spam confidence: 0.894128046745
```

```
Enter the file name: mbox-short.txt
Average spam confidence: 0.750718518519
```

Test your file on the *mbox.txt* and *mbox-short.txt* files.

Exercise 3:

Sometimes when programmers get bored or want to have a bit of fun, they add a harmless *Easter Egg* to their program. Modify the program that prompts the user for the file name so that it prints a funny message when the user types in the exact file name “na na boo boo”. The program should behave normally for all other files which exist and don’t exist. Here is a sample execution of the program:

```
python egg.py
Enter the file name: mbox.txt
There were 1797 subject lines in mbox.txt

python egg.py
Enter the file name: missing.tyxt
File cannot be opened: missing.tyxt

python egg.py
Enter the file name: na na boo boo
NA NA BOO BOO TO YOU - You have been punk'd!
```

We are not encouraging you to put Easter Eggs in your programs; this is just an exercise.

Chapter 8

Lists

8.1 A list is a sequence

Like a string, a *list* is a sequence of values. In a string, the values are characters; in a list, they can be any type. The values in lists are called *elements* or sometimes *items*.

There are several ways to create a new list; the simplest is to enclose the elements in square brackets (“[” and “]”):

```
[10, 20, 30, 40]
['crunchy frog', 'ram bladder', 'lark vomit']
```

The first example is a list of four integers. The second is a list of three strings. The elements of a list don't have to be the same type. The following list contains a string, a float, an integer, and (lo!) another list:

```
['spam', 2.0, 5, [10, 20]]
```

A list within another list is *nested*.

A list that contains no elements is called an empty list; you can create one with empty brackets, [].

As you might expect, you can assign list values to variables:

```
>>> cheeses = ['Cheddar', 'Edam', 'Gouda']
>>> numbers = [17, 123]
>>> empty = []
>>> print(cheeses, numbers, empty)
['Cheddar', 'Edam', 'Gouda'] [17, 123] []
```

8.2 Lists are mutable

The syntax for accessing the elements of a list is the same as for accessing the characters of a string: the bracket operator. The expression inside the brackets specifies the index. Remember that the indices start at 0:

```
>>> print(cheeses[0])
Cheddar
```

Unlike strings, lists are mutable because you can change the order of items in a list or reassign an item in a list. When the bracket operator appears on the left side of an assignment, it identifies the element of the list that will be assigned.

```
>>> numbers = [17, 123]
>>> numbers[1] = 5
>>> print(numbers)
[17, 5]
```

The one-th element of `numbers`, which used to be 123, is now 5.

You can think of a list as a relationship between indices and elements. This relationship is called a *mapping*; each index “maps to” one of the elements.

List indices work the same way as string indices:

- Any integer expression can be used as an index.
- If you try to read or write an element that does not exist, you get an `IndexError`.
- If an index has a negative value, it counts backward from the end of the list.

The `in` operator also works on lists.

```
>>> cheeses = ['Cheddar', 'Edam', 'Gouda']
>>> 'Edam' in cheeses
True
>>> 'Brie' in cheeses
False
```

8.3 Traversing a list

The most common way to traverse the elements of a list is with a `for` loop. The syntax is the same as for strings:

```
for cheese in cheeses:
    print(cheese)
```

This works well if you only need to read the elements of the list. But if you want to write or update the elements, you need the indices. A common way to do that is to combine the functions `range` and `len`:

```
for i in range(len(numbers)):
    numbers[i] = numbers[i] * 2
```

This loop traverses the list and updates each element. `len` returns the number of elements in the list. `range` returns a list of indices from 0 to $n - 1$, where n is the length of the list. Each time through the loop, `i` gets the index of the next element. The assignment statement in the body uses `i` to read the old value of the element and to assign the new value.

A `for` loop over an empty list never executes the body:

```
for x in empty:
    print('This never happens.')
```

Although a list can contain another list, the nested list still counts as a single element. The length of this list is four:

```
['spam', 1, ['Brie', 'Roquefort', 'Pol le Veq'], [1, 2, 3]]
```

8.4 List operations

The `+` operator concatenates lists:

```
>>> a = [1, 2, 3]
>>> b = [4, 5, 6]
>>> c = a + b
>>> print(c)
[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]
```

Similarly, the `*` operator repeats a list a given number of times:

```
>>> [0] * 4
[0, 0, 0, 0]
>>> [1, 2, 3] * 3
[1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3]
```

The first example repeats four times. The second example repeats the list three times.

8.5 List slices

The slice operator also works on lists:

```
>>> t = ['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f']
>>> t[1:3]
['b', 'c']
>>> t[:4]
['a', 'b', 'c', 'd']
>>> t[3:]
['d', 'e', 'f']
```

If you omit the first index, the slice starts at the beginning. If you omit the second, the slice goes to the end. So if you omit both, the slice is a copy of the whole list.

```
>>> t[:]
['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f']
```

Since lists are mutable, it is often useful to make a copy before performing operations that fold, spindle, or mutilate lists.

A slice operator on the left side of an assignment can update multiple elements:

```
>>> t = ['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f']
>>> t[1:3] = ['x', 'y']
>>> print(t)
['a', 'x', 'y', 'd', 'e', 'f']
```

8.6 List methods

Python provides methods that operate on lists. For example, `append` adds a new element to the end of a list:

```
>>> t = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> t.append('d')
>>> print(t)
['a', 'b', 'c', 'd']
```

`extend` takes a list as an argument and appends all of the elements:

```
>>> t1 = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> t2 = ['d', 'e']
>>> t1.extend(t2)
>>> print(t1)
['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e']
```

This example leaves `t2` unmodified.

`sort` arranges the elements of the list from low to high:


```
>>> t = ['d', 'c', 'e', 'b', 'a']
>>> t.sort()
>>> print(t)
['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e']
```

Most list methods are void; they modify the list and return `None`. If you accidentally write `t = t.sort()`, you will be disappointed with the result.

8.7 Deleting elements

There are several ways to delete elements from a list. If you know the index of the element you want, you can use `pop`:

```
>>> t = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> x = t.pop(1)
>>> print(t)
['a', 'c']
>>> print(x)
b
```

`pop` modifies the list and returns the element that was removed. If you don't provide an index, it deletes and returns the last element.

If you don't need the removed value, you can use the `del` statement:

```
>>> t = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> del t[1]
>>> print(t)
['a', 'c']
```

If you know the element you want to remove (but not the index), you can use `remove`:

```
>>> t = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> t.remove('b')
>>> print(t)
['a', 'c']
```

The return value from `remove` is `None`.

To remove more than one element, you can use `del` with a slice index:

```
>>> t = ['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f']
>>> del t[1:5]
>>> print(t)
['a', 'f']
```

As usual, the slice selects all the elements up to, but not including, the second index.

8.8 Lists and functions

There are a number of built-in functions that can be used on lists that allow you to quickly look through a list without writing your own loops:

```
>>> nums = [3, 41, 12, 9, 74, 15]
>>> print(len(nums))
6
>>> print(max(nums))
74
>>> print(min(nums))
3
>>> print(sum(nums))
154
>>> print(sum(nums)/len(nums))
25
```

The `sum()` function only works when the list elements are numbers. The other functions (`max()`, `len()`, etc.) work with lists of strings and other types that can be comparable.

We could rewrite an earlier program that computed the average of a list of numbers entered by the user using a list.

First, the program to compute an average without a list:

```
total = 0
count = 0
while (True):
    inp = input('Enter a number: ')
    if inp == 'done': break
    value = float(inp)
    total = total + value
    count = count + 1

average = total / count
print('Average:', average)
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/avenum.py>

In this program, we have `count` and `total` variables to keep the number and running total of the user's numbers as we repeatedly prompt the user for a number.

We could simply remember each number as the user entered it and use built-in functions to compute the sum and count at the end.

```
numlist = list()
while (True):
    inp = input('Enter a number: ')
    if inp == 'done': break
    value = float(inp)
```

```
numlist.append(value)

average = sum(numlist) / len(numlist)
print('Average:', average)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/avelist.py
```

We make an empty list before the loop starts, and then each time we have a number, we append it to the list. At the end of the program, we simply compute the sum of the numbers in the list and divide it by the count of the numbers in the list to come up with the average.

8.9 Lists and strings

A string is a sequence of characters and a list is a sequence of values, but a list of characters is not the same as a string. To convert from a string to a list of characters, you can use `list`:

```
>>> s = 'spam'
>>> t = list(s)
>>> print(t)
['s', 'p', 'a', 'm']
```

Because `list` is the name of a built-in function, you should avoid using it as a variable name. I also avoid the letter “l” because it looks too much like the number “1”. So that’s why I use “t”.

The `list` function breaks a string into individual letters. If you want to break a string into words, you can use the `split` method:

```
>>> s = 'pining for the fjords'
>>> t = s.split()
>>> print(t)
['pining', 'for', 'the', 'fjords']
>>> print(t[2])
the
```

Once you have used `split` to break the string into a list of words, you can use the index operator (square bracket) to look at a particular word in the list.

You can call `split` with an optional argument called a *delimiter* that specifies which characters to use as word boundaries. The following example uses a hyphen as a delimiter:

```
>>> s = 'spam-spam-spam'
>>> delimiter = '-'
>>> s.split(delimiter)
['spam', 'spam', 'spam']
```

`join` is the inverse of `split`. It takes a list of strings and concatenates the elements. `join` is a string method, so you have to invoke it on the delimiter and pass the list as a parameter:

```
>>> t = ['pinning', 'for', 'the', 'fjords']
>>> delimiter = ' '
>>> delimiter.join(t)
'pinning for the fjords'
```

In this case the delimiter is a space character, so `join` puts a space between words. To concatenate strings without spaces, you can use the empty string, "", as a delimiter.

8.10 Parsing lines

Usually when we are reading a file we want to do something to the lines other than just printing the whole line. Often we want to find the “interesting lines” and then *parse* the line to find some interesting *part* of the line. What if we wanted to print out the day of the week from those lines that start with “From”?

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
```

The `split` method is very effective when faced with this kind of problem. We can write a small program that looks for lines where the line starts with “From”, `split` those lines, and then print out the third word in the line:

```
fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in fhand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    if not line.startswith('From '): continue
    words = line.split()
    print(words[2])

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/search5.py
```

The program produces the following output:

```
Sat
Fri
Fri
Fri
...
```

Later, we will learn increasingly sophisticated techniques for picking the lines to work on and how we pull those lines apart to find the exact bit of information we are looking for.



Figure 8.1: Variables and Objects

8.11 Objects and values

If we execute these assignment statements:

```
a = 'banana'
b = 'banana'
```

we know that `a` and `b` both refer to a string, but we don't know whether they refer to the *same* string. There are two possible states:

In one case, `a` and `b` refer to two different objects that have the same value. In the second case, they refer to the same object.

To check whether two variables refer to the same object, you can use the `is` operator.

```
>>> a = 'banana'
>>> b = 'banana'
>>> a is b
True
```

In this example, Python only created one string object, and both `a` and `b` refer to it.

But when you create two lists, you get two objects:

```
>>> a = [1, 2, 3]
>>> b = [1, 2, 3]
>>> a is b
False
```

In this case we would say that the two lists are *equivalent*, because they have the same elements, but not *identical*, because they are not the same object. If two objects are identical, they are also equivalent, but if they are equivalent, they are not necessarily identical.

Until now, we have been using “object” and “value” interchangeably, but it is more precise to say that an object has a value. If you execute `a = [1, 2, 3]`, `a` refers to a list object whose value is a particular sequence of elements. If another list has the same elements, we would say it has the same value.

8.12 Aliasing

If `a` refers to an object and you assign `b = a`, then both variables refer to the same object:

```
>>> a = [1, 2, 3]
>>> b = a
>>> b is a
True
```

The association of a variable with an object is called a *reference*. In this example, there are two references to the same object.

An object with more than one reference has more than one name, so we say that the object is *aliased*.

If the aliased object is mutable, changes made with one alias affect the other:

```
>>> b[0] = 17
>>> print(a)
[17, 2, 3]
```

Although this behavior can be useful, it is error-prone. In general, it is safer to avoid aliasing when you are working with mutable objects.

For immutable objects like strings, aliasing is not as much of a problem. In this example:

```
a = 'banana'
b = 'banana'
```

it almost never makes a difference whether `a` and `b` refer to the same string or not.

8.13 List arguments

When you pass a list to a function, the function gets a reference to the list. If the function modifies a list parameter, the caller sees the change. For example, `delete_head` removes the first element from a list:

```
def delete_head(t):
    del t[0]
```

Here's how it is used:

```
>>> letters = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> delete_head(letters)
>>> print(letters)
['b', 'c']
```

The parameter `t` and the variable `letters` are aliases for the same object.

It is important to distinguish between operations that modify lists and operations that create new lists. For example, the `append` method modifies a list, but the `+` operator creates a new list:

```
>>> t1 = [1, 2]
>>> t2 = t1.append(3)
>>> print(t1)
[1, 2, 3]
>>> print(t2)
None

>>> t3 = t1 + [3]
>>> print(t3)
[1, 2, 3]
>>> t1 is t3
False
```

This difference is important when you write functions that are supposed to modify lists. For example, this function *does not* delete the head of a list:

```
def bad_delete_head(t):
    t = t[1:]                # WRONG!
```

The slice operator creates a new list and the assignment makes `t` refer to it, but none of that has any effect on the list that was passed as an argument.

An alternative is to write a function that creates and returns a new list. For example, `tail` returns all but the first element of a list:

```
def tail(t):
    return t[1:]
```

This function leaves the original list unmodified. Here's how it is used:

```
>>> letters = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> rest = tail(letters)
>>> print(rest)
['b', 'c']
```

Exercise 1: Write a function called `chop` that takes a list and modifies it, removing the first and last elements, and returns `None`. Then write a function called `middle` that takes a list and returns a new list that contains all but the first and last elements.

8.14 Debugging

Careless use of lists (and other mutable objects) can lead to long hours of debugging. Here are some common pitfalls and ways to avoid them:

1. Don't forget that most list methods modify the argument and return `None`. This is the opposite of the string methods, which return a new string and leave the original alone.

If you are used to writing string code like this:

```
word = word.strip()
```

It is tempting to write list code like this:

```
t = t.sort()           # WRONG!
```

Because `sort` returns `None`, the next operation you perform with `t` is likely to fail.

Before using list methods and operators, you should read the documentation carefully and then test them in interactive mode. The methods and operators that lists share with other sequences (like strings) are documented at:

docs.python.org/library/stdtypes.html#common-sequence-operations

The methods and operators that only apply to mutable sequences are documented at:

docs.python.org/library/stdtypes.html#mutable-sequence-types

2. Pick an idiom and stick with it.

Part of the problem with lists is that there are too many ways to do things. For example, to remove an element from a list, you can use `pop`, `remove`, `del`, or even a slice assignment.

To add an element, you can use the `append` method or the `+` operator. But don't forget that these are right:

```
t.append(x)
t = t + [x]
```

And these are wrong:

```
t.append([x])          # WRONG!
t = t.append(x)         # WRONG!
t + [x]                # WRONG!
t = t + x               # WRONG!
```

Try out each of these examples in interactive mode to make sure you understand what they do. Notice that only the last one causes a runtime error; the other three are legal, but they do the wrong thing.

3. Make copies to avoid aliasing.

If you want to use a method like `sort` that modifies the argument, but you need to keep the original list as well, you can make a copy.


```
orig = t[:]
t.sort()
```

In this example you could also use the built-in function `sorted`, which returns a new, sorted list and leaves the original alone. But in that case you should avoid using `sorted` as a variable name!

4. Lists, `split`, and files

When we read and parse files, there are many opportunities to encounter input that can crash our program so it is a good idea to revisit the *guardian* pattern when it comes to writing programs that read through a file and look for a “needle in the haystack”.

Let’s revisit our program that is looking for the day of the week on the from lines of our file:

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
```

Since we are breaking this line into words, we could dispense with the use of `startswith` and simply look at the first word of the line to determine if we are interested in the line at all. We can use `continue` to skip lines that don’t have “From” as the first word as follows:

```
fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in fhand:
    words = line.split()
    if words[0] != 'From' : continue
    print(words[2])
```

This looks much simpler and we don’t even need to do the `rstrip` to remove the newline at the end of the file. But is it better?

```
python search8.py
Sat
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "search8.py", line 5, in <module>
    if words[0] != 'From' : continue
IndexError: list index out of range
```

It kind of works and we see the day from the first line (Sat), but then the program fails with a traceback error. What went wrong? What messed-up data caused our elegant, clever, and very Pythonic program to fail?

You could stare at it for a long time and puzzle through it or ask someone for help, but the quicker and smarter approach is to add a `print` statement. The best place to add the print statement is right before the line where the program failed and print out the data that seems to be causing the failure.

Now this approach may generate a lot of lines of output, but at least you will immediately have some clue as to the problem at hand. So we add a print of the variable `words` right before line five. We even add a prefix “Debug:” to the line so we can keep our regular output separate from our debug output.

```

for line in fhand:
    words = line.split()
    print('Debug:', words)
    if words[0] != 'From' : continue
    print(words[2])

```

When we run the program, a lot of output scrolls off the screen but at the end, we see our debug output and the traceback so we know what happened just before the traceback.

```

Debug: ['X-DSPAM-Confidence:', '0.8475']
Debug: ['X-DSPAM-Probability:', '0.0000']
Debug: []
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "search9.py", line 6, in <module>
    if words[0] != 'From' : continue
IndexError: list index out of range

```

Each debug line is printing the list of words which we get when we `split` the line into words. When the program fails, the list of words is empty `[]`. If we open the file in a text editor and look at the file, at that point it looks as follows:

```

X-DSPAM-Result: Innocent
X-DSPAM-Processed: Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
X-DSPAM-Confidence: 0.8475
X-DSPAM-Probability: 0.0000

```

Details: <http://source.sakaiproject.org/viewsvn/?view=rev&rev=39772>

The error occurs when our program encounters a blank line! Of course there are “zero words” on a blank line. Why didn’t we think of that when we were writing the code? When the code looks for the first word (`word[0]`) to check to see if it matches “From”, we get an “index out of range” error.

This of course is the perfect place to add some *guardian* code to avoid checking the first word if the first word is not there. There are many ways to protect this code; we will choose to check the number of words we have before we look at the first word:

```

fhand = open('mbox-short.txt')
count = 0
for line in fhand:
    words = line.split()
    # print('Debug:', words)
    if len(words) == 0 : continue
    if words[0] != 'From' : continue
    print(words[2])

```

First we commented out the debug print statement instead of removing it, in case our modification fails and we need to debug again. Then we added a guardian statement that checks to see if we have zero words, and if so, we use `continue` to skip to the next line in the file.

We can think of the two `continue` statements as helping us refine the set of lines which are “interesting” to us and which we want to process some more. A line which has no words is “uninteresting” to us so we skip to the next line. A line which does not have “From” as its first word is uninteresting to us so we skip it.

The program as modified runs successfully, so perhaps it is correct. Our guardian statement does make sure that the `words[0]` will never fail, but perhaps it is not enough. When we are programming, we must always be thinking, “What might go wrong?”

Exercise 2: Figure out which line of the above program is still not properly guarded. See if you can construct a text file which causes the program to fail and then modify the program so that the line is properly guarded and test it to make sure it handles your new text file.

Exercise 3: Rewrite the guardian code in the above example without two `if` statements. Instead, use a compound logical expression using the `or` logical operator with a single `if` statement.

8.15 Glossary

aliasing A circumstance where two or more variables refer to the same object.

delimiter A character or string used to indicate where a string should be split.

element One of the values in a list (or other sequence); also called items.

equivalent Having the same value.

index An integer value that indicates an element in a list.

identical Being the same object (which implies equivalence).

list A sequence of values.

list traversal The sequential accessing of each element in a list.

nested list A list that is an element of another list.

object Something a variable can refer to. An object has a type and a value.

reference The association between a variable and its value.

8.16 Exercises

Exercise 4: Find all unique words in a file

Shakespeare used over 20,000 words in his works. But how would you determine that? How would you produce the list of all the words that Shakespeare used? Would you download all his work, read it and track all unique words by hand?

Let’s use Python to achieve that instead. List all unique words, sorted in alphabetical order, that are stored in a file `romeo.txt` containing a subset of Shakespeare’s work.

To get started, download a copy of the file www.py4e.com/code3/romeo.txt. Create a list of unique words, which will contain the final result. Write a program to open the file `romeo.txt` and read it line by line. For each line, split the line into a list of words using the `split` function. For each word, check to see if the word is

already in the list of unique words. If the word is not in the list of unique words, add it to the list. When the program completes, sort and print the list of unique words in alphabetical order.

```
Enter file: romeo.txt
['Arise', 'But', 'It', 'Juliet', 'Who', 'already',
'and', 'breaks', 'east', 'envious', 'fair', 'grief',
'is', 'kill', 'light', 'moon', 'pale', 'sick', 'soft',
'sun', 'the', 'through', 'what', 'window',
'with', 'yonder']
```

Exercise 5: Minimalist Email Client.

MBOX (mail box) is a popular file format to store and share a collection of emails. This was used by early email servers and desktop apps. Without getting into too many details, MBOX is a text file, which stores emails consecutively. Emails are separated by a special line which starts with **From** (notice the space). Importantly, lines starting with **From:** (notice the colon) describes the email itself and does not act as a separator. Imagine you wrote a minimalist email app, that lists the email of the senders in the user's Inbox and counts the number of emails.

Write a program to read through the mail box data and when you find line that starts with “From”, you will split the line into words using the `split` function. We are interested in who sent the message, which is the second word on the From line.

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
```

You will parse the From line and print out the second word for each From line, then you will also count the number of From (not From:) lines and print out a count at the end. This is a good sample output with a few lines removed:

```
python fromcount.py
Enter a file name: mbox-short.txt
stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za
louis@media.berkeley.edu
zqian@umich.edu

[...some output removed...]

ray@media.berkeley.edu
cwen@iupui.edu
cwen@iupui.edu
cwen@iupui.edu
There were 27 lines in the file with From as the first word
```

Exercise 6:

Rewrite the program that prompts the user for a list of numbers and prints out the maximum and minimum of the numbers at the end when the user enters “done”. Write the program to store the numbers the user enters in a list and use the `max()` and `min()` functions to compute the maximum and minimum numbers after the loop completes.

```
Enter a number: 6
Enter a number: 2
Enter a number: 9
Enter a number: 3
Enter a number: 5
Enter a number: done
Maximum: 9.0
Minimum: 2.0
```


Chapter 9

Dictionaries

A *dictionary* is like a list, but more general. In a list, the index positions have to be integers; in a dictionary, the indices can be (almost) any type.

You can think of a dictionary as a mapping between a set of indices (which are called *keys*) and a set of values. Each key maps to a value. The association of a key and a value is called a *key-value pair* or sometimes an *item*.

As an example, we'll build a dictionary that maps from English to Spanish words, so the keys and the values are all strings.

The function `dict` creates a new dictionary with no items. Because `dict` is the name of a built-in function, you should avoid using it as a variable name.

```
>>> eng2sp = dict()
>>> print(eng2sp)
{}
```

The curly brackets, `{}`, represent an empty dictionary. To add items to the dictionary, you can use square brackets:

```
>>> eng2sp['one'] = 'uno'
```

This line creates an item that maps from the key `'one'` to the value `"uno"`. If we print the dictionary again, we see a key-value pair with a colon between the key and value:

```
>>> print(eng2sp)
{'one': 'uno'}
```

This output format is also an input format. For example, you can create a new dictionary with three items.

```
>>> eng2sp = {'one': 'uno', 'two': 'dos', 'three': 'tres'}
>>> print(eng2sp)
{'one': 'uno', 'two': 'dos', 'three': 'tres'}
```

Since Python 3.7x the order of key-value pairs is the same as their input order, i.e. dictionaries are now ordered structures.

But that doesn't really matter because the elements of a dictionary are never indexed with integer indices. Instead, you use the keys to look up the corresponding values:

```
>>> print(eng2sp['two'])
'dos'
```

The key 'two' always maps to the value “dos” so the order of the items doesn't matter.

If the key isn't in the dictionary, you get an exception:

```
>>> print(eng2sp['four'])
KeyError: 'four'
```

The `len` function works on dictionaries; it returns the number of key-value pairs:

```
>>> len(eng2sp)
3
```

The `in` operator works on dictionaries; it tells you whether something appears as a *key* in the dictionary (appearing as a value is not good enough).

```
>>> 'one' in eng2sp
True
>>> 'uno' in eng2sp
False
```

To see whether something appears as a value in a dictionary, you can use the method `values`, which returns the values as a type that can be converted to a list, and then use the `in` operator:

```
>>> vals = list(eng2sp.values())
>>> 'uno' in vals
True
```

The `in` operator uses different algorithms for lists and dictionaries. For lists, it uses a linear search algorithm. As the list gets longer, the search time gets longer in direct proportion to the length of the list. For dictionaries, Python uses an algorithm called a *hash table* that has a remarkable property: the `in` operator takes about the same amount of time no matter how many items there are in a dictionary. I won't explain why hash functions are so magical, but you can read more about it at wikipedia.org/wiki/Hash_table.¹

¹If you do want to learn more about hash tables, there is a course at <https://www.cc4e.com> that explores how the programming language C implements a Python dictionary.

Exercise 1: Download a copy of the file

www.py4e.com/code3/words.txt

Write a program that reads the words in *words.txt* and stores them as keys in a dictionary. It doesn't matter what the values are. Then you can use the `in` operator as a fast way to check whether a string is in the dictionary.

9.1 Dictionary as a set of counters

Suppose you are given a string and you want to count how many times each letter appears. There are several ways you could do it:

1. You could create 26 variables, one for each letter of the alphabet. Then you could traverse the string and, for each character, increment the corresponding counter, probably using a chained conditional.
2. You could create a list with 26 elements. Then you could convert each character to a number (using the built-in function `ord`), use the number as an index into the list, and increment the appropriate counter.
3. You could create a dictionary with characters as keys and counters as the corresponding values. The first time you see a character, you would add an item to the dictionary. After that you would increment the value of an existing item.

Each of these options performs the same computation, but each of them implements that computation in a different way.

An *implementation* is a way of performing a computation; some implementations are better than others. For example, an advantage of the dictionary implementation is that we don't have to know ahead of time which letters appear in the string and we only have to make room for the letters that do appear.

Here is what the code might look like:

```
word = 'brontosaurus'
d = dict()
for c in word:
    if c not in d:
        d[c] = 1
    else:
        d[c] = d[c] + 1
print(d)
```

We are effectively computing a *histogram*, which is a statistical term for a set of counters (or frequencies).

The `for` loop traverses the string. Each time through the loop, if the character `c` is not in the dictionary, we create a new item with key `c` and the initial value 1 (since we have seen this letter once). If `c` is already in the dictionary we increment `d['c']`.

Here's the output of the program:

```
{'b': 1, 'r': 2, 'o': 2, 'n': 1, 't': 1, 's': 2, 'a': 1, 'u': 2}
```

The histogram indicates that the letters “a” and “b” appear once; “o” appears twice, and so on.

Dictionaries have a method called `get` that takes a key and a default value. If the key appears in the dictionary, `get` returns the corresponding value; otherwise it returns the default value. For example:

```
>>> counts = { 'chuck' : 1 , 'annie' : 42, 'jan': 100}
>>> print(counts.get('jan', 0))
100
>>> print(counts.get('tim', 0))
0
```

We can use `get` to write our histogram loop more concisely. Because the `get` method automatically handles the case where a key is not in a dictionary, we can reduce four lines down to one and eliminate the `if` statement.

```
word = 'brontosaurus'
d = dict()
for c in word:
    d[c] = d.get(c,0) + 1
print(d)
```

The use of the `get` method to simplify this counting loop ends up being a very commonly used “idiom” in Python and we will use it many times in the rest of the book. So you should take a moment and compare the loop using the `if` statement and `in` operator with the loop using the `get` method. They do exactly the same thing, but one is more succinct.

9.2 Dictionaries and files

One of the common uses of a dictionary is to count the occurrence of words in a file with some written text. Let’s start with a very simple file of words taken from the text of *Romeo and Juliet*.

For the first set of examples, we will use a shortened and simplified version of the text with no punctuation. Later we will work with the text of the scene with punctuation included.

```
But soft what light through yonder window breaks
It is the east and Juliet is the sun
Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon
Who is already sick and pale with grief
```

We will write a Python program to read through the lines of the file, break each line into a list of words, and then loop through each of the words in the line and count each word using a dictionary.

You will see that we have two `for` loops. The outer loop is reading the lines of the file and the inner loop is iterating through each of the words on that particular line. This is an example of a pattern called *nested loops* because one of the loops is the *outer* loop and the other loop is the *inner* loop.

Because the inner loop executes all of its iterations each time the outer loop makes a single iteration, we think of the inner loop as iterating “more quickly” and the outer loop as iterating more slowly.

The combination of the two nested loops ensures that we will count every word on every line of the input file.

```
fname = input('Enter the file name: ')
try:
    fhand = open(fname)
except:
    print('File cannot be opened:', fname)
    exit()

counts = dict()
for line in fhand:
    words = line.split()
    for word in words:
        if word not in counts:
            counts[word] = 1
        else:
            counts[word] += 1

print(counts)
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/count1.py>

In our `else` statement, we use the more compact alternative for incrementing a variable. `counts[word] += 1` is equivalent to `counts[word] = counts[word] + 1`. Either method can be used to change the value of a variable by any desired amount. Similar alternatives exist for `-=`, `*=`, and `/=`.

When we run the program, we see a raw dump of all of the counts in unsorted hash order. (the *romeo.txt* file is available at www.py4e.com/code3/romeo.txt)

```
python count1.py
Enter the file name: romeo.txt
{'But': 1, 'soft': 1, 'what': 1, 'light': 1, 'through': 1, 'yonder': 1,
'window': 1, 'breaks': 1, 'It': 1, 'is': 3, 'the': 3, 'east': 1, 'and': 3,
'Juliet': 1, 'sun': 2, 'Arise': 1, 'fair': 1, 'kill': 1, 'envious': 1,
'moon': 1, 'Who': 1, 'already': 1, 'sick': 1, 'pale': 1, 'with': 1,
'grief': 1}
```

It is a bit inconvenient to look through the dictionary to find the most common words and their counts, so we need to add some more Python code to get us the output that will be more helpful.

9.3 Looping and dictionaries

If you use a dictionary as the sequence in a `for` statement, it traverses the keys of the dictionary. This loop prints each key and the corresponding value:

```
counts = { 'chuck' : 1 , 'annie' : 42, 'jan': 100}
for key in counts:
    print(key, counts[key])
```

Here's what the output looks like:

```
chuck 1
annie 42
jan 100
```

Again, the keys are ordered.

We can use this pattern to implement the various loop idioms that we have described earlier. For example if we wanted to find all the entries in a dictionary with a value above ten, we could write the following code:

```
counts = { 'chuck' : 1 , 'annie' : 42, 'jan': 100}
for key in counts:
    if counts[key] > 10 :
        print(key, counts[key])
```

The `for` loop iterates through the *keys* of the dictionary, so we must use the index operator to retrieve the corresponding *value* for each key. Here's what the output looks like:

```
annie 42
jan 100
```

We see only the entries with a value above 10.

If you want to print the keys in alphabetical order, you first make a list of the keys in the dictionary using the `keys` method available in dictionary objects, and then sort that list and loop through the sorted list, looking up each key and printing out key-value pairs in sorted order as follows:

```
counts = { 'chuck' : 1 , 'annie' : 42, 'jan': 100}
lst = list(counts.keys())
print(lst)
lst.sort()
print(lst)
for key in lst:
    print(key, counts[key])
```

Here's what the output looks like:

```
['chuck', 'annie', 'jan']
['annie', 'chuck', 'jan']
annie 42
chuck 1
jan 100
```

First you see the list of keys in non-alphabetical order that we get from the `keys` method. Then we see the key-value pairs in alphabetical order from the `for` loop.

9.4 Advanced text parsing

In the above example using the file *romeo.txt*, we made the file as simple as possible by removing all punctuation by hand. The actual text has lots of punctuation, as shown below.

```
But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
```

Since the Python `split` function looks for spaces and treats words as tokens separated by spaces, we would treat the words “soft!” and “soft” as *different* words and create a separate dictionary entry for each word.

Also since the file has capitalization, we would treat “who” and “Who” as different words with different counts.

We can solve both these problems by using the string methods `lower`, `punctuation`, and `translate`. The `translate` is the most subtle of the methods. Here is the documentation for `translate`:

```
line.translate(str.maketrans(fromstr, tostr, deletestr))
```

Replace the characters in `fromstr` with the character in the same position in `tostr` and delete all characters that are in `deletestr`. The `fromstr` and `tostr` can be empty strings and the `deletestr` parameter can be omitted.

We will not specify the `tostr` but we will use the `deletestr` parameter to delete all of the punctuation. We will even let Python tell us the list of characters that it considers “punctuation”:

```
>>> import string
>>> string.punctuation
'!"#$%&'()*+,-./:;<=>?@[\\]^_`{|}~'
```

The parameters used by `translate` were different in Python 2.0.

We make the following modifications to our program:

```
import string
```

```

fname = input('Enter the file name: ')
try:
    fhand = open(fname)
except:
    print('File cannot be opened:', fname)
    exit()

counts = dict()
for line in fhand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    # First two parameters are empty strings
    line = line.translate(line.maketrans("", "", string.punctuation))
    line = line.lower()
    words = line.split()
    for word in words:
        if word not in counts:
            counts[word] = 1
        else:
            counts[word] += 1

print(counts)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/count2.py

```

Part of learning the “Art of Python” or “Thinking Pythonically” is realizing that Python often has built-in capabilities for many common data analysis problems. Over time, you will see enough example code and read enough of the documentation to know where to look to see if someone has already written something that makes your job much easier.

The following is an abbreviated version of the output:

```

Enter the file name: romeo-full.txt
{'romeo': 40, 'and': 42, 'juliet': 32, 'act': 1, '2': 2, 'scene': 2,
'ii': 1, 'capulets': 1, 'orchard': 2, 'enter': 1, 'he': 5, 'jests': 1,
'at': 9, 'scars': 1, 'that': 30, 'never': 2, 'felt': 1, 'a': 24,
'wound': 1, 'appears': 1, 'above': 6, 'window': 2, 'but': 18,
'soft': 1, 'what': 11, 'light': 5, 'through': 2, 'yonder': 2,
'breaks': 1, ...}

```

Looking through this output is still unwieldy and we can use Python to give us exactly what we are looking for, but to do so, we need to learn about Python *tuples*. We will pick up this example once we learn about tuples.

9.5 Debugging

As you work with bigger datasets it can become unwieldy to debug by printing and checking data by hand. Here are some suggestions for debugging large datasets:

Scale down the input If possible, reduce the size of the dataset. For example if the program reads a text file, start with just the first 10 lines, or with the smallest example you can find. You can either edit the files themselves, or (better) modify the program so it reads only the first *n* lines.

If there is an error, you can reduce *n* to the smallest value that manifests the error, and then increase it gradually as you find and correct errors.

Check summaries and types Instead of printing and checking the entire dataset, consider printing summaries of the data: for example, the number of items in a dictionary or the total of a list of numbers.

A common cause of runtime errors is a value that is not the right type. For debugging this kind of error, it is often enough to print the type of a value.

Write self-checks Sometimes you can write code to check for errors automatically. For example, if you are computing the average of a list of numbers, you could check that the result is not greater than the largest element in the list or less than the smallest. This is called a “sanity check” because it detects results that are “completely illogical”.

Another kind of check compares the results of two different computations to see if they are consistent. This is called a “consistency check”.

Pretty print the output Formatting debugging output can make it easier to spot an error.

Again, time you spend building scaffolding can reduce the time you spend debugging.

9.6 Glossary

dictionary A mapping from a set of keys to their corresponding values.

hashtable The algorithm used to implement Python dictionaries.

hash function A function used by a hashtable to compute the location for a key.

histogram A set of counters.

implementation A way of performing a computation.

item Another name for a key-value pair.

key An object that appears in a dictionary as the first part of a key-value pair.

key-value pair The representation of the mapping from a key to a value.

lookup A dictionary operation that takes a key and finds the corresponding value.

nested loops When there are one or more loops “inside” of another loop. The inner loop runs to completion each time the outer loop runs once.

value An object that appears in a dictionary as the second part of a key-value pair. This is more specific than our previous use of the word “value”.

9.7 Exercises

Exercise 2: Write a program that categorizes each mail message by which day of the week the commit was done. To do this look for lines that start with “From”,

then look for the third word and keep a running count of each of the days of the week. At the end of the program print out the contents of your dictionary (order does not matter).

Sample Line:

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
```

Sample Execution:

```
python dow.py
Enter a file name: mbox-short.txt
{'Fri': 20, 'Thu': 6, 'Sat': 1}
```

Exercise 3: Write a program to read through a mail log, build a histogram using a dictionary to count how many messages have come from each email address, and print the dictionary.

```
Enter file name: mbox-short.txt
{'gopal.ramasammycook@gmail.com': 1, 'louis@media.berkeley.edu': 3,
'cwen@iupui.edu': 5, 'antranig@caret.cam.ac.uk': 1,
'rjlowe@iupui.edu': 2, 'gsilver@umich.edu': 3,
'david.horwitz@uct.ac.za': 4, 'wagnermr@iupui.edu': 1,
'zqian@umich.edu': 4, 'stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za': 2,
'ray@media.berkeley.edu': 1}
```

Exercise 4: Add code to the above program to figure out who has the most messages in the file. After all the data has been read and the dictionary has been created, look through the dictionary using a maximum loop (see Chapter 5: Maximum and minimum loops) to find who has the most messages and print how many messages the person has.

```
Enter a file name: mbox-short.txt
cwen@iupui.edu 5
```

```
Enter a file name: mbox.txt
zqian@umich.edu 195
```

Exercise 5: This program records the domain name (instead of the address) where the message was sent from instead of who the mail came from (i.e., the whole email address). At the end of the program, print out the contents of your dictionary.

```
python schoolcount.py
Enter a file name: mbox-short.txt
{'media.berkeley.edu': 4, 'uct.ac.za': 6, 'umich.edu': 7,
'gmail.com': 1, 'caret.cam.ac.uk': 1, 'iupui.edu': 8}
```


Chapter 10

Tuples

10.1 Tuples are immutable

A tuple¹ is a sequence of values much like a list. The values stored in a tuple can be any type, and they are indexed by integers. The important difference is that tuples are *immutable*. Tuples are also *comparable* and *hashable* so we can sort lists of them and use tuples as key values in Python dictionaries.

Syntactically, a tuple is a comma-separated list of values:

```
>>> t = 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e'
```

Although it is not necessary, it is common to enclose tuples in parentheses to help us quickly identify tuples when we look at Python code:

```
>>> t = ('a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e')
```

To create a tuple with a single element, you have to include the final comma:

```
>>> t1 = ('a',)
>>> type(t1)
<type 'tuple'>
```

Without the comma Python treats ('a') as an expression with a string in parentheses that evaluates to a string:

```
>>> t2 = ('a')
>>> type(t2)
<type 'str'>
```

Another way to construct a tuple is the built-in function `tuple`. With no argument, it creates an empty tuple:

¹Fun fact: The word “tuple” comes from the names given to sequences of numbers of varying lengths: single, double, triple, quadruple, quintuple, sextuple, septuple, etc.

```
>>> t = tuple()
>>> print(t)
()
```

If the argument is a sequence (string, list, or tuple), the result of the call to `tuple` is a tuple with the elements of the sequence:

```
>>> t = tuple('lupins')
>>> print(t)
('l', 'u', 'p', 'i', 'n', 's')
```

Because `tuple` is the name of a constructor, you should avoid using it as a variable name.

Most list operators also work on tuples. The bracket operator indexes an element:

```
>>> t = ('a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e')
>>> print(t[0])
'a'
```

And the slice operator selects a range of elements.

```
>>> print(t[1:3])
('b', 'c')
```

But if you try to modify one of the elements of the tuple, you get an error:

```
>>> t[0] = 'A'
TypeError: object doesn't support item assignment
```

You can't modify the elements of a tuple, but you can replace one tuple with another:

```
>>> t = ('A',) + t[1:]
>>> print(t)
('A', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e')
```

10.2 Comparing tuples

The comparison operators work with tuples and other sequences. Python starts by comparing the first element from each sequence. If they are equal, it goes on to the next element, and so on, until it finds elements that differ. Subsequent elements are not considered (even if they are really big).

```
>>> (0, 1, 2) < (0, 3, 4)
True
>>> (0, 1, 2000000) < (0, 3, 4)
True
```

The `sort` function works the same way. It sorts primarily by first element, but in the case of a tie, it sorts by second element, and so on.

This feature lends itself to a pattern called *DSU* for

Decorate a sequence by building a list of tuples with one or more sort keys preceding the elements from the sequence,
Sort the list of tuples using the Python built-in `sort`, and
Undecorate by extracting the sorted elements of the sequence.

For example, suppose you have a list of words and you want to sort them from longest to shortest:

```
txt = 'but soft what light in yonder window breaks'
words = txt.split()
t = list()
for word in words:
    t.append((len(word), word))

t.sort(reverse=True)

res = list()
for length, word in t:
    res.append(word)

print(res)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/soft.py
```

The first loop builds a list of tuples, where each tuple is a word preceded by its length.

`sort` compares the first element, length, first, and only considers the second element to break ties. The keyword argument `reverse=True` tells `sort` to go in decreasing order.

The second loop traverses the list of tuples and builds a list of words in descending order of length. The four-character words are sorted in *reverse* alphabetical order, so “what” appears before “soft” in the following list.

The output of the program is as follows:

```
['yonder', 'window', 'breaks', 'light', 'what',
'soft', 'but', 'in']
```

Of course the line loses much of its poetic impact when turned into a Python list and sorted in descending word length order.

10.3 Tuple assignment

One of the unique syntactic features of the Python language is the ability to have a tuple on the left side and a sequence on the right side of an assignment statement. This allows you to assign more than one variable at a time to the given sequence.

In this example we have a two-element tuple and assign the first and second elements of the tuple to the variables `x` and `y` in a single statement.

```
>>> m = ( 'have', 'fun' )
>>> x, y = m
>>> x
'have'
>>> y
'fun'
>>>
```

This is more general than tuple-to-tuple assignment. Both tuples and lists are sequences, so this syntax works with a two element list as well.

```
>>> m = [ 'have', 'fun' ]
>>> x, y = m
>>> x
'have'
>>> y
'fun'
>>>
```

It is not magic, Python *roughly* translates the tuple assignment syntax to be the following:²

```
>>> m = ( 'have', 'fun' )
>>> x = m[0]
>>> y = m[1]
>>> x
'have'
>>> y
'fun'
>>>
```

Stylistically when we use a tuple on the left side of the assignment statement, we omit the parentheses, but the following is an equally valid syntax:

```
>>> m = ( 'have', 'fun' )
>>> (x, y) = m
>>> x
'have'
```

²Python does not translate the syntax literally. For example, if you try this with a dictionary, it will not work as you might expect.

```
>>> y
'fun'
>>>
```

A particularly clever application of tuple assignment allows us to *swap* the values of two variables in a single statement:

```
>>> a, b = b, a
```

Both sides of this statement are tuples, but the left side is a tuple of variables; the right side is a tuple of expressions. Each value on the right side is assigned to its respective variable on the left side. All the expressions on the right side are evaluated before any of the assignments.

The number of variables on the left and the number of values on the right must be the same:

```
>>> a, b = 1, 2, 3
ValueError: too many values to unpack
```

More generally, the right side can be any kind of sequence (string, list, or tuple). For example, to split an email address into a user name and a domain, you could write:

```
>>> addr = 'monty@python.org'
>>> uname, domain = addr.split('@')
```

The return value from `split` is a list with two elements; the first element is assigned to `uname`, the second to `domain`.

```
>>> print(uname)
monty
>>> print(domain)
python.org
```

10.4 Dictionaries and tuples

Dictionaries have a method called `items` that returns a list of tuples, where each tuple is a key-value pair:

```
>>> d = {'b':1, 'a':10, 'c':22}
>>> t = list(d.items())
>>> print(t)
[('b', 1), ('a', 10), ('c', 22)]
```

As you should expect from a dictionary, the items are in non-alphabetical order.

However, since the list of tuples is a list, and tuples are comparable, we can now sort the list of tuples. Converting a dictionary to a list of tuples is a way for us to output the contents of a dictionary sorted by key:

```
>>> d = {'b':1, 'a':10, 'c':22}
>>> t = list(d.items())
>>> t
[('b', 1), ('a', 10), ('c', 22)]
>>> t.sort()
>>> t
[('a', 10), ('b', 1), ('c', 22)]
```

The new list is sorted in ascending alphabetical order by the key value.

10.5 Multiple assignment with dictionaries

Combining `items`, tuple assignment, and `for`, you can see a nice code pattern for traversing the keys and values of a dictionary in a single loop:

```
d = {'a':10, 'b':1, 'c':22}
for key, val in d.items():
    print(val, key)
```

This loop has two *iteration variables* because `items` returns a list of tuples and `key`, `val` is a tuple assignment that successively iterates through each of the key-value pairs in the dictionary.

For each iteration through the loop, both `key` and `val` are advanced to the next key-value pair in the dictionary (still in hash order).

The output of this loop is:

```
10 a
1 b
22 c
```

Again, it is in hash key order (i.e., no particular order).

If we combine these two techniques, we can print out the contents of a dictionary sorted by the *value* stored in each key-value pair.

To do this, we first make a list of tuples where each tuple is (*value*, *key*). The `items` method would give us a list of (*key*, *value*) tuples, but this time we want to sort by value, not key. Once we have constructed the list with the value-key tuples, it is a simple matter to sort the list in reverse order and print out the new, sorted list.

```
>>> d = {'a':10, 'b':1, 'c':22}
>>> l = list()
>>> for key, val in d.items() :
...     l.append( (val, key) )
...
>>> l
[(10, 'a'), (1, 'b'), (22, 'c')]
```

```
>>> l.sort(reverse=True)
>>> l
[(22, 'c'), (10, 'a'), (1, 'b')]
>>>
```

By carefully constructing the list of tuples to have the value as the first element of each tuple, we can sort the list of tuples and get our dictionary contents sorted by value.

10.6 The most common words

Coming back to our running example of the text from *Romeo and Juliet* Act 2, Scene 2, we can augment our program to use this technique to print the ten most common words in the text as follows:

```
import string
fhand = open('romeo-full.txt')
counts = dict()
for line in fhand:
    line = line.translate(str.maketrans('', '', string.punctuation))
    line = line.lower()
    words = line.split()
    for word in words:
        if word not in counts:
            counts[word] = 1
        else:
            counts[word] += 1

# Sort the dictionary by value
lst = list()
for key, val in list(counts.items()):
    lst.append((val, key))

lst.sort(reverse=True)

for key, val in lst[:10]:
    print(key, val)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/count3.py
```

The first part of the program which reads the file and computes the dictionary that maps each word to the count of words in the document is unchanged. But instead of simply printing out `counts` and ending the program, we construct a list of `(val, key)` tuples and then sort the list in reverse order.

Since the value is first, it will be used for the comparisons. If there is more than one tuple with the same value, it will look at the second element (the key), so tuples where the value is the same will be further sorted by the alphabetical order of the key.

At the end we write a nice `for` loop which does a multiple assignment iteration and prints out the ten most common words by iterating through a slice of the list (`lst[:10]`).

So now the output finally looks like what we want for our word frequency analysis.

```
61 i
42 and
40 romeo
34 to
34 the
32 thou
32 juliet
30 that
29 my
24 thee
```

The fact that this complex data parsing and analysis can be done with an easy-to-understand 19-line Python program is one reason why Python is a good choice as a language for exploring information.

10.7 Using tuples as keys in dictionaries

Because tuples are *hashable* and lists are not, if we want to create a *composite* key to use in a dictionary we must use a tuple as the key.

We would encounter a composite key if we wanted to create a telephone directory that maps from last-name, first-name pairs to telephone numbers. Assuming that we have defined the variables `last`, `first`, and `number`, we could write a dictionary assignment statement as follows:

```
directory[last,first] = number
```

The expression in brackets is a tuple. We could use tuple assignment in a `for` loop to traverse this dictionary.

```
for last, first in directory:
    print(first, last, directory[last,first])
```

This loop traverses the keys in `directory`, which are tuples. It assigns the elements of each tuple to `last` and `first`, then prints the name and corresponding telephone number.

10.8 Sequences: strings, lists, and tuples - Oh My!

I have focused on lists of tuples, but almost all of the examples in this chapter also work with lists of lists, tuples of tuples, and tuples of lists. To avoid enumerating the possible combinations, it is sometimes easier to talk about sequences of sequences.

In many contexts, the different kinds of sequences (strings, lists, and tuples) can be used interchangeably. So how and why do you choose one over the others?

To start with the obvious, strings are more limited than other sequences because the elements have to be characters. They are also immutable. If you need the ability to change the characters in a string (as opposed to creating a new string), you might want to use a list of characters instead.

Lists are more common than tuples, mostly because they are mutable. But there are a few cases where you might prefer tuples:

1. In some contexts, like a `return` statement, it is syntactically simpler to create a tuple than a list. In other contexts, you might prefer a list.
2. If you want to use a sequence as a dictionary key, you have to use an immutable type like a tuple or string.
3. If you are passing a sequence as an argument to a function, using tuples reduces the potential for unexpected behavior due to aliasing.

Because tuples are immutable, they don't provide methods like `sort` and `reverse`, which modify existing lists. However Python provides the built-in functions `sorted` and `reversed`, which take any sequence as a parameter and return a new sequence with the same elements in a different order.

10.9 List comprehension

Sometimes you want to create a sequence by using data from another sequence. You can achieve this by writing a for loop and appending one item at a time. For example, if you wanted to convert a list of strings – each string storing digits – into numbers that you can sum up, you would write:

```
list_of_ints_in_strings = ['42', '65', '12']
list_of_ints = []
for x in list_of_ints_in_strings:
    list_of_ints.append(int(x))

print(sum(list_of_ints))
```

With list comprehension, the above code can be written in a more compact manner:

```
list_of_ints_in_strings = ['42', '65', '12']
list_of_ints = [ int(x) for x in list_of_ints_in_strings ]
print(sum(list_of_ints))
```

10.10 Debugging

Lists, dictionaries and tuples are known generically as *data structures*; in this chapter we are starting to see compound data structures, like lists of tuples, and dictionaries that contain tuples as keys and lists as values. Compound data structures are useful, but they are prone to what I call *shape errors*; that is, errors caused when a data structure has the wrong type, size, or composition, or perhaps you write some code and forget the shape of your data and introduce an error. For example, if you are expecting a list with one integer and I give you a plain old integer (not in a list), it won't work.

10.11 Glossary

comparable A type where one value can be checked to see if it is greater than, less than, or equal to another value of the same type. Types which are comparable can be put in a list and sorted.

data structure A collection of related values, often organized in lists, dictionaries, tuples, etc.

DSU Abbreviation of “decorate-sort-undecorate”, a pattern that involves building a list of tuples, sorting, and extracting part of the result.

gather The operation of assembling a variable-length argument tuple.

hashable A type that has a hash function. Immutable types like integers, floats, and strings are hashable; mutable types like lists and dictionaries are not.

scatter The operation of treating a sequence as a list of arguments.

shape (of a data structure) A summary of the type, size, and composition of a data structure.

singleton A list (or other sequence) with a single element.

tuple An immutable sequence of elements.

tuple assignment An assignment with a sequence on the right side and a tuple of variables on the left. The right side is evaluated and then its elements are assigned to the variables on the left.

10.12 Exercises

Exercise 1: Revise a previous program as follows: Read and parse the “From” lines and pull out the addresses from the line. Count the number of messages from each person using a dictionary.

After all the data has been read, print the person with the most commits by creating a list of (count, email) tuples from the dictionary. Then sort the list in reverse order and print out the person who has the most commits.

Sample Line:

```
From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008
```

```
Enter a file name: mbox-short.txt
cwen@iupui.edu 5
```

```
Enter a file name: mbox.txt
zqian@umich.edu 195
```

Exercise 2: This program counts the distribution of the hour of the day for each of the messages. You can pull the hour from the “From” line by finding the time string and then splitting that string into parts using the colon character. Once you have accumulated the counts for each hour, print out the counts, one per line, sorted by hour as shown below.

```
python timeofday.py
Enter a file name: mbox-short.txt
04 3
06 1
07 1
09 2
10 3
11 6
14 1
15 2
16 4
17 2
18 1
19 1
```

Exercise 3: Write a program that reads a file and prints the *letters* in decreasing order of frequency.

Your program should convert all the input to lower case and only count the letters a-z. Your program should not count spaces, digits, punctuation, or anything other than the letters a-z. Find text samples from several different languages and see how letter frequency varies between languages. Compare your results with the tables at https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_frequencies.

Chapter 11

Regular expressions

So far we have been reading through files, looking for patterns and extracting various bits of lines that we find interesting. We have been using string methods like `split` and `find` and using lists and string slicing to extract portions of the lines.

This task of searching and extracting is so common that Python has a very powerful module called *regular expressions* that handles many of these tasks quite elegantly. The reason we have not introduced regular expressions earlier in the book is because while they are very powerful, they are a little complicated and their syntax takes some getting used to.

Regular expressions are almost their own little programming language for searching and parsing strings. As a matter of fact, entire books have been written on the topic of regular expressions. In this chapter, we will only cover the basics of regular expressions. For more detail on regular expressions, see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regular_expression

<https://docs.python.org/library/re.html>

The regular expression module `re` must be imported into your program before you can use it. The simplest use of the regular expression module is the `search()` function. The following program demonstrates a trivial use of the search function.

```
# Search for lines that contain 'From'
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    if re.search('From:', line):
        print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re01.py
```

We open the file, loop through each line, and use the regular expression `search()` to only print out lines that contain the string “From:”. This program does not

use the real power of regular expressions, since we could have just as easily used `line.find()` to accomplish the same result.

The power of the regular expressions comes when we add special characters to the search string that allow us to more precisely control which lines match the string. Adding these special characters to our regular expression allow us to do sophisticated matching and extraction while writing very little code.

For example, the caret character is used in regular expressions to match “the beginning” of a line. We could change our program to only match lines where “From:” was at the beginning of the line as follows:

```
# Search for lines that start with 'From'
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    if re.search('^From:', line):
        print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re02.py
```

Now we will only match lines that *start with* the string “From:”. This is still a very simple example that we could have done equivalently with the `startswith()` method from the string module. But it serves to introduce the notion that regular expressions contain special action characters that give us more control as to what will match the regular expression.

11.1 Character matching in regular expressions

There are a number of other special characters that let us build even more powerful regular expressions. The most commonly used special character is the period or full stop, which matches any character.

In the following example, the regular expression `F..m:` would match any of the strings “From:”, “Fxxm:”, “F12m:”, or “F!@m:” since the period characters in the regular expression match any character.

```
# Search for lines that start with 'F', followed by
# 2 characters, followed by 'm:'
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    if re.search('F..m:', line):
        print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re03.py
```

This is particularly powerful when combined with the ability to indicate that a character can be repeated any number of times using the `*` or `+` characters in your regular expression. These special characters mean that instead of matching a single character in the search string, they match zero-or-more characters (in the case of the asterisk) or one-or-more of the characters (in the case of the plus sign).

We can further narrow down the lines that we match using a repeated *wild card* character in the following example:

```
# Search for lines that start with From and have an at sign
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    if re.search('^From: .+@', line):
        print(line)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re04.py
```

The search string `^From: .+@` will successfully match lines that start with “From:”, followed by one or more characters (`+`), followed by an at-sign. So this will match the following line:

```
From: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za
```

You can think of the `+` wildcard as expanding to match all the characters between the colon character and the at-sign.

```
From: .+@
```

It is good to think of the plus and asterisk characters as “pushy”. For example, the following string would match the last at-sign in the string as the `+` pushes outwards, as shown below:

```
From: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za, csev@umich.edu, and cwen @iupui.edu
```

It is possible to tell an asterisk or plus sign not to be so “greedy” by adding another character. See the detailed documentation for information on turning off the greedy behavior.

11.2 Extracting data using regular expressions

If we want to extract data from a string in Python we can use the `findall()` method to extract all of the substrings which match a regular expression. Let’s use the example of wanting to extract anything that looks like an email address from any line regardless of format. For example, we want to pull the email addresses from each of the following lines:

```

From stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za Sat Jan  5 09:14:16 2008
Return-Path: <postmaster@collab.sakaiproject.org>
             for <source@collab.sakaiproject.org>;
Received: (from apache@localhost)
Author: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za

```

We don't want to write code for each of the types of lines, splitting and slicing differently for each line. This following program uses `findall()` to find the lines with email addresses in them and extract one or more addresses from each of those lines.

```

import re
s = 'A message from csev@umich.edu to cwen@iupui.edu about meeting @2PM'
lst = re.findall('\S+@\S+', s)
print(lst)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re05.py

```

The `findall()` method searches the string in the second argument and returns a list of all of the strings that look like email addresses. We are using a two-character sequence that matches a non-whitespace character (`\S`).

The output of the program would be:

```
['csev@umich.edu', 'cwen@iupui.edu']
```

Translating the regular expression, we are looking for substrings that have at least one non-whitespace character, followed by an at-sign, followed by at least one more non-whitespace character. The `\S+` matches as many non-whitespace characters as possible.

The regular expression would match twice (`csev@umich.edu` and `cwen@iupui.edu`), but it would not match the string `"@2PM"` because there are no non-blank characters *before* the at-sign. We can use this regular expression in a program to read all the lines in a file and print out anything that looks like an email address as follows:

```

# Search for lines that have an at sign between characters
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    x = re.findall('\S+@\S+', line)
    if len(x) > 0:
        print(x)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re06.py

```

We read each line and then extract all the substrings that match our regular expression. Since `findall()` returns a list, we simply check if the number of

elements in our returned list is more than zero to print only lines where we found at least one substring that looks like an email address.

If we run the program on *mbbox-short.txt* we get the following output:

```
...
['<source@collab.sakaiproject.org>;']
['<source@collab.sakaiproject.org>;']
['apache@localhost']
['source@collab.sakaiproject.org;']
['cwen@iupui.edu']
['source@collab.sakaiproject.org']
['cwen@iupui.edu']
['cwen@iupui.edu']
['cwen@iupui.edu']
['wagnermr@iupui.edu']
```

Some of our email addresses have incorrect characters like “<” or “;” at the beginning or end. Let’s declare that we are only interested in the portion of the string that starts and ends with a letter or a number.

To do this, we use another feature of regular expressions. Square brackets are used to indicate a set of multiple acceptable characters we are willing to consider matching. In a sense, the `\S` is asking to match the set of “non-whitespace characters”. Now we will be a little more explicit in terms of the characters we will match.

Here is our new regular expression:

```
[a-zA-Z0-9]\S*\S*[a-zA-Z]
```

This is getting a little complicated and you can begin to see why regular expressions are their own little language unto themselves. Translating this regular expression, we are looking for substrings that start with a *single* lowercase letter, uppercase letter, or number “[a-zA-Z0-9]”, followed by zero or more non-blank characters (`\S*`), followed by an at-sign, followed by zero or more non-blank characters (`\S*`), followed by an uppercase or lowercase letter. Note that we switched from `+` to `*` to indicate zero or more non-blank characters since `[a-zA-Z0-9]` is already one non-blank character. Remember that the `*` or `+` applies to the single character immediately to the left of the plus or asterisk.

If we use this expression in our program, our data is much cleaner:

```
# Search for lines that have an at sign between characters
# The characters must be a letter or number
import re
hand = open('mbbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    x = re.findall('[a-zA-Z0-9]\S*\S*[a-zA-Z]', line)
    if len(x) > 0:
        print(x)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re07.py
```

```
...
['wagnermr@iupui.edu']
['cwen@iupui.edu']
['postmaster@collab.sakaiproject.org']
['200801032122.m03LMFo4005148@nakamura.uits.iupui.edu']
['source@collab.sakaiproject.org']
['source@collab.sakaiproject.org']
['source@collab.sakaiproject.org']
['apache@localhost']
```

Notice that on the `source@collab.sakaiproject.org` lines, our regular expression eliminated two letters at the end of the string (“>”). This is because when we append `[a-zA-Z]` to the end of our regular expression, we are demanding that whatever string the regular expression parser finds must end with a letter. So when it sees the “>” at the end of “sakaiproject.org>,” it simply stops at the last “matching” letter it found (i.e., the “g” was the last good match).

Also note that the output of the program is a Python list that has a string as the single element in the list.

11.3 Combining searching and extracting

If we want to find numbers on lines that start with the string “X-” such as:

```
X-DSPAM-Confidence: 0.8475
X-DSPAM-Probability: 0.0000
```

we don’t just want any floating-point numbers from any lines. We only want to extract numbers from lines that have the above syntax.

We can construct the following regular expression to select the lines:

```
^X-.*: [0-9.]+
```

Translating this, we are saying, we want lines that start with `X-`, followed by zero or more characters `(.*)`, followed by a colon `(:)` and then a space. After the space we are looking for one or more characters that are either a digit (0-9) or a period `[0-9.]+`. Note that inside the square brackets, the period matches an actual period (i.e., it is not a wildcard between the square brackets).

This is a very tight expression that will pretty much match only the lines we are interested in as follows:

```
# Search for lines that start with 'X' followed by any non
# whitespace characters and ':'
# followed by a space and any number.
# The number can include a decimal.
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
```

```

line = line.rstrip()
if re.search('^X\S*: [0-9.]+' , line):
    print(line)

```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/re10.py>

When we run the program, we see the data nicely filtered to show only the lines we are looking for.

```

X-DSPAM-Confidence: 0.8475
X-DSPAM-Probability: 0.0000
X-DSPAM-Confidence: 0.6178
X-DSPAM-Probability: 0.0000
...

```

But now we have to solve the problem of extracting the numbers. While it would be simple enough to use `split`, we can use another feature of regular expressions to both search and parse the line at the same time.

Parentheses are another special character in regular expressions. When you add parentheses to a regular expression, they are ignored when matching the string. But when you are using `findall()`, parentheses indicate that while you want the whole expression to match, you only are interested in extracting a portion of the substring that matches the regular expression.

So we make the following change to our program:

```

# Search for lines that start with 'X' followed by any
# non whitespace characters and ':' followed by a space
# and any number. The number can include a decimal.
# Then print the number if it is greater than zero.
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    x = re.findall('^X\S*: ([0-9.]+' , line)
    if len(x) > 0:
        print(x)

```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/re11.py>

Instead of calling `search()`, we add parentheses around the part of the regular expression that represents the floating-point number to indicate we only want `findall()` to give us back the floating-point number portion of the matching string.

The output from this program is as follows:

```

['0.8475']
['0.0000']
['0.6178']

```

```
['0.0000']
['0.6961']
['0.0000']
...
```

The numbers are still in a list and need to be converted from strings to floating point, but we have used the power of regular expressions to both search and extract the information we found interesting.

As another example of this technique, if you look at the file there are a number of lines of the form:

Details: <http://source.sakaiproject.org/viewsvn/?view=rev&rev=39772>

If we wanted to extract all of the revision numbers (the integer number at the end of these lines) using the same technique as above, we could write the following program:

```
# Search for lines that start with 'Details: rev='
# followed by numbers
# Then print the number if one is found
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    x = re.findall('^Details:.*rev=([0-9]+)', line)
    if len(x) > 0:
        print(x)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re12.py
```

Translating our regular expression, we are looking for lines that start with `Details:`, followed by any number of characters (`.*`), followed by `rev=`, and then by one or more digits. We want to find lines that match the entire expression but we only want to extract the integer number at the end of the line, so we surround `[0-9]+` with parentheses.

When we run the program, we get the following output:

```
['39772']
['39771']
['39770']
['39769']
...
```

Remember that the `[0-9]+` is “greedy” and it tries to make as large a string of digits as possible before extracting those digits. This “greedy” behavior is why we get all five digits for each number. The regular expression module expands in both directions until it encounters a non-digit, or the beginning or the end of a line.

Now we can use regular expressions to redo an exercise from earlier in the book where we were interested in the time of day of each mail message. We looked for lines of the form:

From `stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za` Sat Jan 5 09:14:16 2008

and wanted to extract the hour of the day for each line. Previously we did this with two calls to `split`. First the line was split into words and then we pulled out the fifth word and split it again on the colon character to pull out the two characters we were interested in.

While this worked, it actually results in pretty brittle code that is assuming the lines are nicely formatted. If you were to add enough error checking (or a big try/except block) to insure that your program never failed when presented with incorrectly formatted lines, the code would balloon to 10-15 lines of code that was pretty hard to read.

We can do this in a far simpler way with the following regular expression:

```
^From .* [0-9][0-9]:
```

The translation of this regular expression is that we are looking for lines that start with `From` (note the space), followed by any number of characters (`.*`), followed by a space, followed by two digits `[0-9][0-9]`, followed by a colon character. This is the definition of the kinds of lines we are looking for.

In order to pull out only the hour using `findall()`, we add parentheses around the two digits as follows:

```
^From .* ([0-9][0-9]):
```

This results in the following program:

```
# Search for lines that start with From and a character
# followed by a two digit number between 00 and 99 followed by ':'
# Then print the number if one is found
import re
hand = open('mbox-short.txt')
for line in hand:
    line = line.rstrip()
    x = re.findall('^From .* ([0-9][0-9]):', line)
    if len(x) > 0: print(x)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/re13.py
```

When the program runs, it produces the following output:

```
['09']
['18']
['16']
['15']
...
```

11.4 Escape character

Since we use special characters in regular expressions to match the beginning or end of a line or specify wild cards, we need a way to indicate that these characters are “normal” and we want to match the actual character such as a dollar sign or caret.

We can indicate that we want to simply match a character by prefixing that character with a backslash. For example, we can find money amounts with the following regular expression.

```
import re
x = 'We just received $10.00 for cookies.'
y = re.findall('\$[0-9.]+' , x)
```

Since we prefix the dollar sign with a backslash, it actually matches the dollar sign in the input string instead of matching the “end of line”, and the rest of the regular expression matches one or more digits or the period character. *Note:* Inside square brackets, characters are not “special”. So when we say `[0-9.]`, it really means digits or a period. Outside of square brackets, a period is the “wild-card” character and matches any character. Inside square brackets, the period is a period.

11.5 Summary

While this only scratched the surface of regular expressions, we have learned a bit about the language of regular expressions. They are search strings with special characters in them that communicate your wishes to the regular expression system as to what defines “matching” and what is extracted from the matched strings. Here are some of those special characters and character sequences:

`^` Matches the beginning of the line.

`$` Matches the end of the line.

`.` Matches any character (a wildcard).

`\s` Matches a whitespace character.

`\S` Matches a non-whitespace character (opposite of `\s`).

`*` Applies to the immediately preceding character(s) and indicates to match zero or more times.

`*?` Applies to the immediately preceding character(s) and indicates to match zero or more times in “non-greedy mode”.

`+` Applies to the immediately preceding character(s) and indicates to match one or more times.

`+?` Applies to the immediately preceding character(s) and indicates to match one or more times in “non-greedy mode”.

? Applies to the immediately preceding character(s) and indicates to match zero or one time.

?? Applies to the immediately preceding character(s) and indicates to match zero or one time in “non-greedy mode”.

[aeiou] Matches a single character as long as that character is in the specified set. In this example, it would match “a”, “e”, “i”, “o”, or “u”, but no other characters.

[a-z0-9] You can specify ranges of characters using the minus sign. This example is a single character that must be a lowercase letter or a digit.

[^A-Za-z] When the first character in the set notation is a caret, it inverts the logic. This example matches a single character that is anything *other than* an uppercase or lowercase letter.

() When parentheses are added to a regular expression, they are ignored for the purpose of matching, but allow you to extract a particular subset of the matched string rather than the whole string when using `findall()`.

\b Matches the empty string, but only at the start or end of a word.

\B Matches the empty string, but not at the start or end of a word.

\d Matches any decimal digit; equivalent to the set [0-9].

\D Matches any non-digit character; equivalent to the set [^0-9].

11.6 Bonus section for Unix / Linux users

Support for searching files using regular expressions was built into the Unix operating system since the 1960s and it is available in nearly all programming languages in one form or another.

As a matter of fact, there is a command-line program built into Unix called *grep* (Generalized Regular Expression Parser) that does pretty much the same as the `search()` examples in this chapter. So if you have a Macintosh or Linux system, you can try the following commands in your command-line window.

```
$ grep '^From:' mbox-short.txt
From: stephen.marquard@uct.ac.za
From: louis@media.berkeley.edu
From: zqian@umich.edu
From: rjlowe@iupui.edu
```

This tells `grep` to show you lines that start with the string “From:” in the file *mbox-short.txt*. If you experiment with the `grep` command a bit and read the documentation for `grep`, you will find some subtle differences between the regular expression support in Python and the regular expression support in `grep`. As an example, `grep` does not support the non-blank character `\S` so you will need to use the slightly more complex set notation `[^]`, which simply means match a character that is anything other than a space.

11.7 Debugging

Python has some simple and rudimentary built-in documentation that can be quite helpful if you need a quick refresher to trigger your memory about the exact name of a particular method. This documentation can be viewed in the Python interpreter in interactive mode.

You can bring up an interactive help system using `help()`.

```
>>> help()

help> modules
```

If you know what module you want to use, you can use the `dir()` command to find the methods in the module as follows:

```
>>> import re
>>> dir(re)
[.. 'compile', 'copy_reg', 'error', 'escape', 'findall',
'finditer', 'match', 'purge', 'search', 'split', 'sre_compile',
'sre_parse', 'sub', 'subn', 'sys', 'template']
```

You can also get a small amount of documentation on a particular method using the help command combined with the desired method.

```
>>> help (re.search)
Help on function search in module re:

search(pattern, string, flags=0)
    Scan through string looking for a match to the pattern, returning
    a match object, or None if no match was found.

>>>
```

The built-in documentation is not very extensive, but it can be helpful when you are in a hurry or don't have access to a web browser or search engine.

11.8 Glossary

brittle code Code that works when the input data is in a particular format but is prone to breakage if there is some deviation from the correct format. We call this “brittle code” because it is easily broken.

greedy matching The notion that the `+` and `*` characters in a regular expression expand outward to match the largest possible string.

grep A command available in most Unix systems that searches through text files looking for lines that match regular expressions. The command name stands for “Generalized Regular Expression Parser”.

regular expression A language for expressing more complex search strings. A regular expression may contain special characters that indicate that a search only matches at the beginning or end of a line or many other similar capabilities.

wild card A special character that matches any character. In regular expressions the wild-card character is the period.

11.9 Exercises

Exercise 1: Write a simple program to simulate the operation of the **grep** command on Unix. Ask the user to enter a regular expression and count the number of lines that matched the regular expression:

```
$ python grep.py
Enter a regular expression: ^Author
mbox.txt had 1798 lines that matched ^Author
```

```
$ python grep.py
Enter a regular expression: ^X-
mbox.txt had 14368 lines that matched ^X-
```

```
$ python grep.py
Enter a regular expression: java$
mbox.txt had 4175 lines that matched java$
```

Exercise 2: Write a program to look for lines of the form:

New Revision: 39772

Extract the number from each of the lines using a regular expression and the `findall()` method. Compute the average of the numbers and print out the average as an integer.

```
Enter file:mbox.txt
38549
```

```
Enter file:mbox-short.txt
39756
```


Chapter 12

Networked programs

While many of the examples in this book have focused on reading files and looking for data in those files, there are many different sources of information when one considers the Internet.

In this chapter we will pretend to be a web browser and retrieve web pages using the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP). Then we will read through the web page data and parse it.

12.1 Hypertext Transfer Protocol - HTTP

The network protocol that powers the web is actually quite simple and there is built-in support in Python called `socket` which makes it very easy to make network connections and retrieve data over those sockets in a Python program.

A *socket* is much like a file, except that a single socket provides a two-way connection between two programs. You can both read from and write to the same socket. If you write something to a socket, it is sent to the application at the other end of the socket. If you read from the socket, you are given the data which the other application has sent.

But if you try to read a socket¹ when the program on the other end of the socket has not sent any data, you just sit and wait. If the programs on both ends of the socket simply wait for some data without sending anything, they will wait for a very long time, so an important part of programs that communicate over the Internet is to have some sort of protocol.

A protocol is a set of precise rules that determine who is to go first, what they are to do, and then what the responses are to that message, and who sends next, and so on. In a sense the two applications at either end of the socket are doing a dance and making sure not to step on each other's toes.

There are many documents that describe these network protocols. The Hypertext Transfer Protocol is described in the following document:

¹If you want to learn more about sockets, protocols or how web servers are developed, you can explore the course at <https://www.dj4e.com>.

<https://www.w3.org/Protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616.txt>

This is a long and complex 176-page document with a lot of detail. If you find it interesting, feel free to read it all. But if you take a look around page 36 of RFC2616 you will find the syntax for the GET request. To request a document from a web server, we make a connection, e.g. to the `www.pr4e.org` server on port 80, and then send a line of the form

```
GET http://data.pr4e.org/romeo.txt HTTP/1.0
```

where the second parameter is the web page we are requesting, and then we also send a blank line. The web server will respond with some header information about the document and a blank line followed by the document content.

12.2 The world's simplest web browser

Perhaps the easiest way to show how the HTTP protocol works is to write a very simple Python program that makes a connection to a web server and follows the rules of the HTTP protocol to request a document and display what the server sends back.

```
import socket

mysock = socket.socket(socket.AF_INET, socket.SOCK_STREAM)
mysock.connect(('data.pr4e.org', 80))
cmd = 'GET http://data.pr4e.org/romeo.txt HTTP/1.0\r\n\r\n'.encode()
mysock.send(cmd)

while True:
    data = mysock.recv(512)
    if len(data) < 1:
        break
    print(data.decode(),end='')

mysock.close()

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/socket1.py
```

First the program makes a connection to port 80 on the server www.pr4e.com. Since our program is playing the role of the “web browser”, the HTTP protocol says we must send the GET command followed by a blank line. `\r\n` signifies an EOL (end of line), so `\r\n\r\n` signifies nothing between two EOL sequences. That is the equivalent of a blank line.

Once we send that blank line, we write a loop that receives data in 512-character chunks from the socket and prints the data out until there is no more data to read (i.e., the `recv()` returns an empty string).

The program produces the following output:

```
HTTP/1.1 200 OK
```

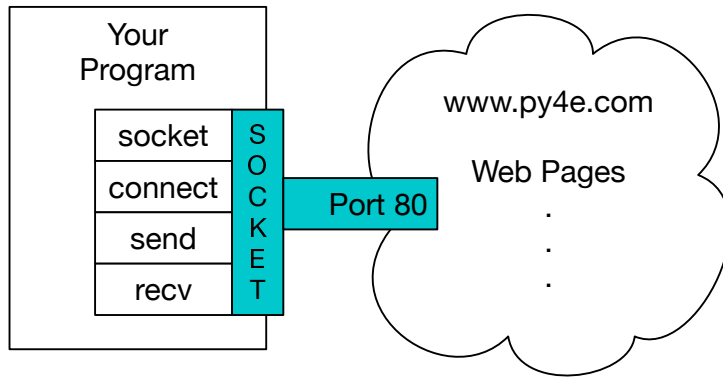


Figure 12.1: A Socket Connection

```

Date: Wed, 11 Apr 2018 18:52:55 GMT
Server: Apache/2.4.7 (Ubuntu)
Last-Modified: Sat, 13 May 2017 11:22:22 GMT
ETag: "a7-54f6609245537"
Accept-Ranges: bytes
Content-Length: 167
Cache-Control: max-age=0, no-cache, no-store, must-revalidate
Pragma: no-cache
Expires: Wed, 11 Jan 1984 05:00:00 GMT
Connection: close
Content-Type: text/plain

```

```

But soft what light through yonder window breaks
It is the east and Juliet is the sun
Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon
Who is already sick and pale with grief

```

The output starts with headers which the web server sends to describe the document. For example, the `Content-Type` header indicates that the document is a plain text document (`text/plain`).

After the server sends us the headers, it adds a blank line to indicate the end of the headers, and then sends the actual data of the file *romeo.txt*.

This example shows how to make a low-level network connection with sockets. Sockets can be used to communicate with a web server or with a mail server or many other kinds of servers. All that is needed is to find the document which describes the protocol and write the code to send and receive the data according to the protocol.

However, since the protocol that we use most commonly is the HTTP web protocol, Python has a special library specifically designed to support the HTTP protocol for the retrieval of documents and data over the web.

One of the requirements for using the HTTP protocol is the need to send and receive data as bytes objects, instead of strings. In the preceding example, the `encode()` and `decode()` methods convert strings into bytes objects and back again.

The next example uses `b''` notation to specify that a variable should be stored as a bytes object. `encode()` and `b''` are equivalent.

```
>>> b'Hello world'
b'Hello world'
>>> 'Hello world'.encode()
b'Hello world'
```

12.3 Retrieving an image over HTTP

In the above example, we retrieved a plain text file which had newlines in the file and we simply copied the data to the screen as the program ran. We can use a similar program to retrieve an image across using HTTP. Instead of copying the data to the screen as the program runs, we accumulate the data in a string, trim off the headers, and then save the image data to a file as follows:

```
import socket
import time

HOST = 'data.pr4e.org'
PORT = 80
mysock = socket.socket(socket.AF_INET, socket.SOCK_STREAM)
mysock.connect((HOST, PORT))
mysock.sendall(b'GET http://data.pr4e.org/cover3.jpg HTTP/1.0\r\n\r\n')
count = 0
picture = b""

while True:
    data = mysock.recv(5120)
    if len(data) < 1: break
    #time.sleep(0.25)
    count = count + len(data)
    print(len(data), count)
    picture = picture + data

mysock.close()

# Look for the end of the header (2 CRLF)
pos = picture.find(b"\r\n\r\n")
print('Header length', pos)
print(picture[:pos].decode())

# Skip past the header and save the picture data
picture = picture[pos+4:]
fhand = open("stuff.jpg", "wb")
fhand.write(picture)
fhand.close()

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/urljpeg.py
```

When the program runs, it produces the following output:

```
$ python urljpeg.py
5120 5120
5120 10240
4240 14480
5120 19600
...
5120 214000
3200 217200
5120 222320
5120 227440
3167 230607
Header length 393
HTTP/1.1 200 OK
Date: Wed, 11 Apr 2018 18:54:09 GMT
Server: Apache/2.4.7 (Ubuntu)
Last-Modified: Mon, 15 May 2017 12:27:40 GMT
ETag: "38342-54f8f2e5b6277"
Accept-Ranges: bytes
Content-Length: 230210
Vary: Accept-Encoding
Cache-Control: max-age=0, no-cache, no-store, must-revalidate
Pragma: no-cache
Expires: Wed, 11 Jan 1984 05:00:00 GMT
Connection: close
Content-Type: image/jpeg
```

You can see that for this url, the `Content-Type` header indicates that body of the document is an image (`image/jpeg`). Once the program completes, you can view the image data by opening the file `stuff.jpg` in an image viewer.

As the program runs, you can see that we don't get 5120 characters each time we call the `recv()` method. We get as many characters as have been transferred across the network to us by the web server at the moment we call `recv()`. In this example, we either get as few as 3200 characters each time we request up to 5120 characters of data.

Your results may be different depending on your network speed. Also note that on the last call to `recv()` we get 3167 bytes, which is the end of the stream, and in the next call to `recv()` we get a zero-length string that tells us that the server has called `close()` on its end of the socket and there is no more data forthcoming.

We can slow down our successive `recv()` calls by uncommenting the call to `time.sleep()`. This way, we wait a quarter of a second after each call so that the server can "get ahead" of us and send more data to us before we call `recv()` again. With the delay, in place the program executes as follows:

```
$ python urljpeg.py
5120 5120
5120 10240
5120 15360
...
5120 225280
```

```

5120 230400
207 230607
Header length 393
HTTP/1.1 200 OK
Date: Wed, 11 Apr 2018 21:42:08 GMT
Server: Apache/2.4.7 (Ubuntu)
Last-Modified: Mon, 15 May 2017 12:27:40 GMT
ETag: "38342-54f8f2e5b6277"
Accept-Ranges: bytes
Content-Length: 230210
Vary: Accept-Encoding
Cache-Control: max-age=0, no-cache, no-store, must-revalidate
Pragma: no-cache
Expires: Wed, 11 Jan 1984 05:00:00 GMT
Connection: close
Content-Type: image/jpeg

```

Now other than the first and last calls to `recv()`, we now get 5120 characters each time we ask for new data.

There is a buffer between the server making `send()` requests and our application making `recv()` requests. When we run the program with the delay in place, at some point the server might fill up the buffer in the socket and be forced to pause until our program starts to empty the buffer. The pausing of either the sending application or the receiving application is called “flow control.”

12.4 Retrieving web pages with `urllib`

While we can manually send and receive data over HTTP using the `socket` library, there is a much simpler way to perform this common task in Python by using the `urllib` library.

Using `urllib`, you can treat a web page much like a file. You simply indicate which web page you would like to retrieve and `urllib` handles all of the HTTP protocol and header details.

The equivalent code to read the *romeo.txt* file from the web using `urllib` is as follows:

```

import urllib.request

fhand = urllib.request.urlopen('http://data.pr4e.org/romeo.txt')
for line in fhand:
    print(line.decode().strip())

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/urllib1.py

```

Once the web page has been opened with `urllib.request.urlopen`, we can treat it like a file and read through it using a `for` loop.

When the program runs, we only see the output of the contents of the file. The headers are still sent, but the `urllib` code consumes the headers and only returns the data to us.

But soft what light through yonder window breaks
It is the east and Juliet is the sun
Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon
Who is already sick and pale with grief

As an example, we can write a program to retrieve the data for `romeo.txt` and compute the frequency of each word in the file as follows:

```
import urllib.request, urllib.parse, urllib.error

fhand = urllib.request.urlopen('http://data.pr4e.org/romeo.txt')

counts = dict()
for line in fhand:
    words = line.decode().split()
    for word in words:
        counts[word] = counts.get(word, 0) + 1
print(counts)

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/urlwords.py
```

Again, once we have opened the web page, we can read it like a local file.

12.5 Reading binary files using urllib

Sometimes you want to retrieve a non-text (or binary) file such as an image or video file. The data in these files is generally not useful to print out, but you can easily make a copy of a URL to a local file on your hard disk using `urllib`.

The pattern is to open the URL and use `read` to download the entire contents of the document into a string variable (`img`) then write that information to a local file as follows:

```
import urllib.request, urllib.parse, urllib.error

img = urllib.request.urlopen('http://data.pr4e.org/cover3.jpg').read()
fhand = open('cover3.jpg', 'wb')
fhand.write(img)
fhand.close()

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/curl1.py
```

This program reads all of the data in at once across the network and stores it in the variable `img` in the main memory of your computer, then opens the file `cover.jpg` and writes the data out to your disk. The `wb` argument for `open()` opens a binary file for writing only. This program will work if the size of the file is less than the size of the memory of your computer.

However if this is a large audio or video file, this program may crash or at least run extremely slowly when your computer runs out of memory. In order to avoid

running out of memory, we retrieve the data in blocks (or buffers) and then write each block to your disk before retrieving the next block. This way the program can read any size file without using up all of the memory you have in your computer.

```
import urllib.request, urllib.parse, urllib.error

img = urllib.request.urlopen('http://data.pr4e.org/cover3.jpg')
fhand = open('cover3.jpg', 'wb')
size = 0
while True:
    info = img.read(100000)
    if len(info) < 1: break
    size = size + len(info)
    fhand.write(info)

print(size, 'characters copied.')
fhand.close()
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/curl2.py>

In this example, we read only 100,000 characters at a time and then write those characters to the `cover3.jpg` file before retrieving the next 100,000 characters of data from the web.

This program runs as follows:

```
python curl2.py
230210 characters copied.
```

12.6 Parsing HTML and scraping the web

One of the common uses of the `urllib` capability in Python is to *scrape* the web. Web scraping is when we write a program that pretends to be a web browser and retrieves pages, then examines the data in those pages looking for patterns.

As an example, a search engine such as Google will look at the source of one web page and extract the links to other pages and retrieve those pages, extracting links, and so on. Using this technique, Google *spiders* its way through nearly all of the pages on the web.

Google also uses the frequency of links from pages it finds to a particular page as one measure of how “important” a page is and how high the page should appear in its search results.

12.7 Parsing HTML using regular expressions

One simple way to parse HTML is to use regular expressions to repeatedly search for and extract substrings that match a particular pattern.

Here is a simple web page:

```
<h1>The First Page</h1>
<p>
If you like, you can switch to the
<a href="http://www.dr-chuck.com/page2.htm">
Second Page</a>.
</p>
```

We can construct a well-formed regular expression to match and extract the link values from the above text as follows:

```
href="http[s]?://.+?"
```

Our regular expression looks for strings that start with “href=“http://” or “href=“https://”, followed by one or more characters (.+?), followed by another double quote. The question mark behind the [s]? indicates to search for the string “http” followed by zero or one “s”.

The question mark added to the .+? indicates that the match is to be done in a “non-greedy” fashion instead of a “greedy” fashion. A non-greedy match tries to find the *smallest* possible matching string and a greedy match tries to find the *largest* possible matching string.

We add parentheses to our regular expression to indicate which part of our matched string we would like to extract, and produce the following program:

```
# Search for link values within URL input
import urllib.request, urllib.parse, urllib.error
import re
import ssl

# Ignore SSL certificate errors
ctx = ssl.create_default_context()
ctx.check_hostname = False
ctx.verify_mode = ssl.CERT_NONE

url = input('Enter - ')
html = urllib.request.urlopen(url, context=ctx).read()
links = re.findall(b'href="(http[s]?://.*?)"', html)
for link in links:
    print(link.decode())

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/urlregex.py
```

The `ssl` library allows this program to access web sites that strictly enforce HTTPS. The `read` method returns HTML source code as a bytes object instead of returning an `HTTPResponse` object. The `findall` regular expression method will give us a list of all of the strings that match our regular expression, returning only the link text between the double quotes.

When we run the program and input a URL, we get the following output:

```

Enter - https://docs.python.org
https://docs.python.org/3/index.html
https://www.python.org/
https://docs.python.org/3.8/
https://docs.python.org/3.7/
https://docs.python.org/3.5/
https://docs.python.org/2.7/
https://www.python.org/doc/versions/
https://www.python.org/dev/peps/
https://wiki.python.org/moin/BeginnersGuide
https://wiki.python.org/moin/PythonBooks
https://www.python.org/doc/av/
https://www.python.org/
https://www.python.org/psf/donations/
http://sphinx.pocoo.org/

```

Regular expressions work very nicely when your HTML is well formatted and predictable. But since there are a lot of “broken” HTML pages out there, a solution only using regular expressions might either miss some valid links or end up with bad data.

This can be solved by using a robust HTML parsing library.

12.8 Parsing HTML using BeautifulSoup

Even though HTML looks like XML² and some pages are carefully constructed to be XML, most HTML is generally broken in ways that cause an XML parser to reject the entire page of HTML as improperly formed.

There are a number of Python libraries which can help you parse HTML and extract data from the pages. Each of the libraries has its strengths and weaknesses and you can pick one based on your needs.

As an example, we will simply parse some HTML input and extract links using the *BeautifulSoup* library. BeautifulSoup tolerates highly flawed HTML and still lets you easily extract the data you need. You can download and install the BeautifulSoup code from:

<https://pypi.python.org/pypi/beautifulsoup4>

Information on installing BeautifulSoup with the Python Package Index tool pip is available at:

<https://packaging.python.org/tutorials/installing-packages/>

We will use `urllib` to read the page and then use BeautifulSoup to extract the `href` attributes from the anchor (a) tags.

```

# To run this, download the BeautifulSoup zip file
# http://www.py4e.com/code3/bs4.zip
# and unzip it in the same directory as this file

```

²The XML format is described in the next chapter.

```

import urllib.request, urllib.parse, urllib.error
from bs4 import BeautifulSoup
import ssl

# Ignore SSL certificate errors
ctx = ssl.create_default_context()
ctx.check_hostname = False
ctx.verify_mode = ssl.CERT_NONE

url = input('Enter - ')
html = urllib.request.urlopen(url, context=ctx).read()
soup = BeautifulSoup(html, 'html.parser')

# Retrieve all of the anchor tags
tags = soup('a')
for tag in tags:
    print(tag.get('href', None))

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/urllinks.py

```

The program prompts for a web address, then opens the web page, reads the data and passes the data to the BeautifulSoup parser, and then retrieves all of the anchor tags and prints out the href attribute for each tag.

When the program runs, it produces the following output:

```

Enter - https://docs.python.org
genindex.html
py-modindex.html
https://www.python.org/
#
whatsnew/3.6.html
whatsnew/index.html
tutorial/index.html
library/index.html
reference/index.html
using/index.html
howto/index.html
installing/index.html
distributing/index.html
extending/index.html
c-api/index.html
faq/index.html
py-modindex.html
genindex.html
glossary.html
search.html
contents.html
bugs.html
about.html
license.html
copyright.html
download.html

```

```

https://docs.python.org/3.8/
https://docs.python.org/3.7/
https://docs.python.org/3.5/
https://docs.python.org/2.7/
https://www.python.org/doc/versions/
https://www.python.org/dev/peps/
https://wiki.python.org/moin/BeginnersGuide
https://wiki.python.org/moin/PythonBooks
https://www.python.org/doc/av/
genindex.html
py-modindex.html
https://www.python.org/
#
copyright.html
https://www.python.org/psf/donations/
bugs.html
http://sphinx.pocoo.org/

```

This list is much longer because some HTML anchor tags are relative paths (e.g., `tutorial/index.html`) or in-page references (e.g., `#`) that do not include “`http://`” or “`https://`”, which was a requirement in our regular expression.

You can use also BeautifulSoup to pull out various parts of each tag:

```

# To run this, download the BeautifulSoup zip file
# http://www.py4e.com/code3/bs4.zip
# and unzip it in the same directory as this file

```

```

from urllib.request import urlopen
from bs4 import BeautifulSoup
import ssl

# Ignore SSL certificate errors
ctx = ssl.create_default_context()
ctx.check_hostname = False
ctx.verify_mode = ssl.CERT_NONE

url = input('Enter - ')
html = urlopen(url, context=ctx).read()
soup = BeautifulSoup(html, "html.parser")

```

```

# Retrieve all of the anchor tags
tags = soup('a')
for tag in tags:
    # Look at the parts of a tag
    print('TAG:', tag)
    print('URL:', tag.get('href', None))
    print('Contents:', tag.contents[0])
    print('Attrs:', tag.attrs)

```

```

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/urllink2.py

```

```
python urllink2.py
```

```

Enter - http://www.dr-chuck.com/page1.htm
TAG: <a href="http://www.dr-chuck.com/page2.htm">
Second Page</a>
URL: http://www.dr-chuck.com/page2.htm
Content: ['\nSecond Page']
Attrs: [('href', 'http://www.dr-chuck.com/page2.htm')]

```

`html.parser` is the HTML parser included in the standard Python 3 library. Information on other HTML parsers is available at:

<http://www.crummy.com/software/BeautifulSoup/bs4/doc/#installing-a-parser>

These examples only begin to show the power of BeautifulSoup when it comes to parsing HTML.

12.9 Bonus section for Unix / Linux users

If you have a Linux, Unix, or Macintosh computer, you probably have commands built in to your operating system that retrieves both plain text and binary files using the HTTP or File Transfer (FTP) protocols. One of these commands is `curl`:

```
$ curl -O http://www.py4e.com/cover.jpg
```

The command `curl` is short for “copy URL” and so the two examples listed earlier to retrieve binary files with `urllib` are cleverly named `curl1.py` and `curl2.py` on www.py4e.com/code3 as they implement similar functionality to the `curl` command. There is also a `curl3.py` sample program that does this task a little more effectively, in case you actually want to use this pattern in a program you are writing.

A second command that functions very similarly is `wget`:

```
$ wget http://www.py4e.com/cover.jpg
```

Both of these commands make retrieving webpages and remote files a simple task.

12.10 Glossary

BeautifulSoup A Python library for parsing HTML documents and extracting data from HTML documents that compensates for most of the imperfections in the HTML that browsers generally ignore. You can download the BeautifulSoup code from www.crummy.com.

port A number that generally indicates which application you are contacting when you make a socket connection to a server. As an example, web traffic usually uses port 80 while email traffic uses port 25.

scrape When a program pretends to be a web browser and retrieves a web page, then looks at the web page content. Often programs are following the links in one page to find the next page so they can traverse a network of pages or a social network.

socket A network connection between two applications where the applications can send and receive data in either direction.

spider The act of a web search engine retrieving a page and then all the pages linked from a page and so on until they have nearly all of the pages on the Internet which they use to build their search index.

12.11 Exercises

Exercise 1: Change the socket program `socket1.py` to prompt the user for the URL so it can read any web page.

You can use `split('/')` to break the URL into its component parts so you can extract the host name for the socket `connect` call. Add error checking using `try` and `except` to handle the condition where the user enters an improperly formatted or non-existent URL.

Exercise 2: Change your socket program so that it counts the number of characters it has received and stops displaying any text after it has shown 3000 characters. The program should retrieve the entire document and count the total number of characters and display the count of the number of characters at the end of the document.

Exercise 3: Use `urllib` to replicate the previous exercise of (1) retrieving the document from a URL, (2) displaying up to 3000 characters, and (3) counting the overall number of characters in the document. Don't worry about the headers for this exercise, simply show the first 3000 characters of the document contents.

Exercise 4: Change the `urllinks.py` program to extract and count paragraph (p) tags from the retrieved HTML document and display the count of the paragraphs as the output of your program. Do not display the paragraph text, only count them. Test your program on several small web pages as well as some larger web pages.

Exercise 5: (Advanced) Change the socket program so that it only shows data after the headers and a blank line have been received. Remember that `recv` receives characters (newlines and all), not lines.

Chapter 13

Using Web Services

Once it became easy to retrieve documents and parse documents over HTTP using programs, it did not take long to develop an approach where we started producing documents that were specifically designed to be consumed by other programs (i.e., not HTML to be displayed in a browser).

There are two common formats that we use when exchanging data across the web. eXtensible Markup Language (XML) has been in use for a very long time and is best suited for exchanging document-style data. When programs just want to exchange dictionaries, lists, or other internal information with each other, they use JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) (see www.json.org). We will look at both formats.

13.1 eXtensible Markup Language - XML

XML looks very similar to HTML, but XML is more structured than HTML. Here is a sample of an XML document:

```
<person>
  <name>Chuck</name>
  <phone type="intl">
    +1 734 303 4456
  </phone>
  <email hide="yes" />
</person>
```

Each pair of opening (e.g., `<person>`) and closing tags (e.g., `</person>`) represents a *element* or *node* with the same name as the tag (e.g., `person`). Each element can have some text, some attributes (e.g., `hide`), and other nested elements. If an XML element is empty (i.e., has no content), then it may be depicted by a self-closing tag (e.g., `<email />`).

Often it is helpful to think of an XML document as a tree structure where there is a top element (here: `person`), and other tags (e.g., `phone`) are drawn as *children* of their *parent* elements.



Figure 13.1: A Tree Representation of XML

13.2 Parsing XML

Here is a simple application that parses some XML and extracts some data elements from the XML:

```
import xml.etree.ElementTree as ET

data = '''
<person>
  <name>Chuck</name>
  <phone type="intl">
    +1 734 303 4456
  </phone>
  <email hide="yes" />
</person>'''

tree = ET.fromstring(data)
print('Name:', tree.find('name').text)
print('Attr:', tree.find('email').get('hide'))

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/xml1.py
```

The triple single quote ('''), as well as the triple double quote ("""), allow for the creation of strings that span multiple lines.

Calling `fromstring` converts the string representation of the XML into a “tree” of XML elements. When the XML is in a tree, we have a series of methods we can call to extract portions of data from the XML string. The `find` function searches through the XML tree and retrieves the element that matches the specified tag.

```
Name: Chuck
Attr: yes
```

Using an XML parser such as `ElementTree` has the advantage that while the XML in this example is quite simple, it turns out there are many rules regarding

valid XML, and using `ElementTree` allows us to extract data from XML without worrying about the rules of XML syntax.

13.3 Looping through nodes

Often the XML has multiple nodes and we need to write a loop to process all of the nodes. In the following program, we loop through all of the `user` nodes:

```
import xml.etree.ElementTree as ET

input = '''
<stuff>
  <users>
    <user x="2">
      <id>001</id>
      <name>Chuck</name>
    </user>
    <user x="7">
      <id>009</id>
      <name>Brent</name>
    </user>
  </users>
</stuff>'''

stuff = ET.fromstring(input)
lst = stuff.findall('users/user')
print('User count:', len(lst))

for item in lst:
    print('Name', item.find('name').text)
    print('Id', item.find('id').text)
    print('Attribute', item.get('x'))

# Code: https://www.py4e.com/code3/xml2.py
```

The `findall` method retrieves a Python list of subtrees that represent the `user` structures in the XML tree. Then we can write a `for` loop that looks at each of the user nodes, and prints the `name` and `id` text elements as well as the `x` attribute from the `user` node.

```
User count: 2
Name Chuck
Id 001
Attribute 2
Name Brent
Id 009
Attribute 7
```

It is important to include all parent level elements in the `findall` statement except for the top level element (e.g., `users/user`). Otherwise, Python will not find any desired nodes.

```
import xml.etree.ElementTree as ET

input = '''
<stuff>
  <users>
    <user x="2">
      <id>001</id>
      <name>Chuck</name>
    </user>
    <user x="7">
      <id>009</id>
      <name>Brent</name>
    </user>
  </users>
</stuff>'''

stuff = ET.fromstring(input)

lst = stuff.findall('users/user')
print('User count:', len(lst))

lst2 = stuff.findall('user')
print('User count:', len(lst2))
```

`lst` stores all `user` elements that are nested within their `users` parent. `lst2` looks for `user` elements that are not nested within the top level `stuff` element where there are none.

```
User count: 2
User count: 0
```

13.4 JavaScript Object Notation - JSON

The JSON format was inspired by the object and array format used in the JavaScript language. But since Python was invented before JavaScript, Python's syntax for dictionaries and lists influenced the syntax of JSON. So the format of JSON is nearly identical to a combination of Python lists and dictionaries.

Here is a JSON encoding that is roughly equivalent to the simple XML from above:

```
{
  "name" : "Chuck",
  "phone" : {
    "type" : "intl",
    "number" : "+1 734 303 4456"
```

```

    },
    "email" : {
        "hide" : "yes"
    }
}

```

You will notice some differences. First, in XML, we can add attributes like “intl” to the “phone” tag. In JSON, we simply have key-value pairs. Also the XML “person” tag is gone, replaced by a set of outer curly braces.

In general, JSON structures are simpler than XML because JSON has fewer capabilities than XML. But JSON has the advantage that it maps *directly* to some combination of dictionaries and lists. And since nearly all programming languages have something equivalent to Python’s dictionaries and lists, JSON is a very natural format to have two cooperating programs exchange data.

JSON is quickly becoming the format of choice for nearly all data exchange between applications because of its relative simplicity compared to XML.

13.5 Parsing JSON

We construct our JSON by nesting dictionaries and lists as needed. In this example, we represent a list of users where each user is a set of key-value pairs (i.e., a dictionary). So we have a list of dictionaries.

In the following program, we use the built-in `json` library to parse the JSON and read through the data. Compare this closely to the equivalent XML data and code above. The JSON has less detail, so we must know in advance that we are getting a list and that the list is of users and each user is a set of key-value pairs. The JSON is more succinct (an advantage) but also is less self-describing (a disadvantage).

```

import json

data = '''
[
    { "id" : "001",
      "x" : "2",
      "name" : "Chuck"
    } ,
    { "id" : "009",
      "x" : "7",
      "name" : "Brent"
    }
]'''

info = json.loads(data)
print('User count:', len(info))

for item in info:
    print('Name', item['name'])

```

```
print('Id', item['id'])  
print('Attribute', item['x'])
```

Code: <https://www.py4e.com/code3/json2.py>

If you compare the code to extract data from the parsed JSON and XML you will see that what we get from `json.loads()` is a Python list which we traverse with a `for` loop, and each item within that list is a Python dictionary. Once the JSON has been parsed, we can use the Python index operator to extract the various bits of data for each user. We don't have to use the JSON library to dig through the parsed JSON, since the returned data is simply native Python structures.

The output of this program is exactly the same as the XML version above.

```
User count: 2  
Name Chuck  
Id 001  
Attribute 2  
Name Brent  
Id 009  
Attribute 7
```

In general, there is an industry trend away from XML and towards JSON for web services. Because the JSON is simpler and more directly maps to native data structures we already have in programming languages, the parsing and data extraction code is usually simpler and more direct when using JSON. But XML is more self-descriptive than JSON and so there are some applications where XML retains an advantage. For example, most word processors store documents internally using XML rather than JSON.

13.6 Application Programming Interfaces

We now have the ability to exchange data between applications using Hypertext Transport Protocol (HTTP) and a way to represent complex data that we are sending back and forth between these applications using eXtensible Markup Language (XML) or JavaScript Object Notation (JSON).

The next step is to begin to define and document “contracts” between applications using these techniques. The general name for these application-to-application contracts is *Application Program Interfaces* (APIs). When we use an API, generally one program makes a set of *services* available for use by other applications and publishes the APIs (i.e., the “rules”) that must be followed to access the services provided by the program.

When we begin to build our programs where the functionality of our program includes access to services provided by other programs, we call the approach a *Service-oriented architecture* (SOA). An SOA approach is one where our overall application makes use of the services of other applications. A non-SOA approach is where the application is a single standalone application which contains all of the code necessary to implement the application.

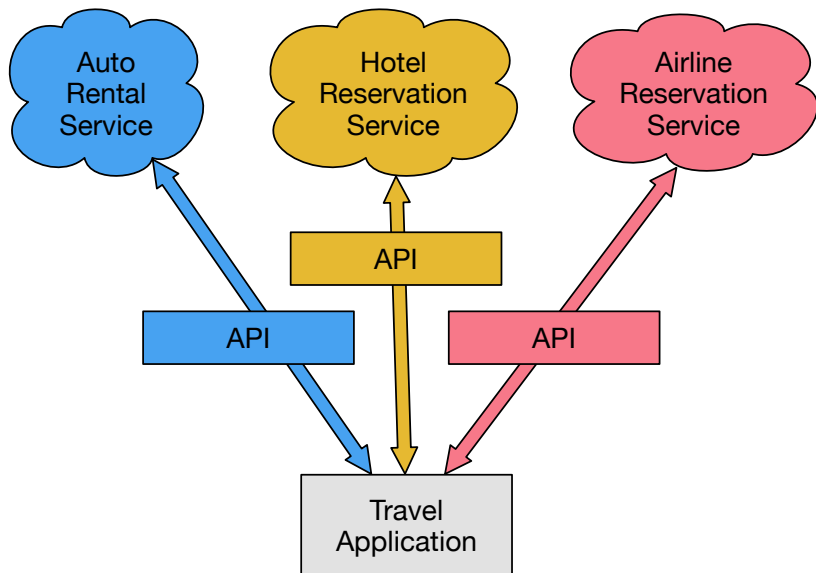


Figure 13.2: Service-oriented architecture

We see many examples of SOA when we use the web. We can go to a single web site and book air travel, hotels, and automobiles all from a single site. The data for hotels is not stored on the airline computers. Instead, the airline computers contact the services on the hotel computers and retrieve the hotel data and present it to the user. When the user agrees to make a hotel reservation using the airline site, the airline site uses another web service on the hotel systems to actually make the reservation. And when it comes time to charge your credit card for the whole transaction, still other computers become involved in the process.

A Service-oriented architecture has many advantages, including: (1) we always maintain only one copy of data (this is particularly important for things like hotel reservations where we do not want to over-commit) and (2) the owners of the data can set the rules about the use of their data. With these advantages, an SOA system must be carefully designed to have good performance and meet the user's needs.

When an application makes a set of services in its API available over the web, we call these *web services*.

13.7 Security and API usage

It is quite common that you need an API key to make use of a vendor's API. The general idea is that they want to know who is using their services and how much each user is using. Perhaps they have free and pay tiers of their services or have a policy that limits the number of requests that a single individual can make during a particular time period.

Sometimes once you get your API key, you simply include the key as part of POST data or perhaps as a parameter on the URL when calling the API.

Other times, the vendor wants increased assurance of the source of the requests and so they expect you to send cryptographically signed messages using shared keys and secrets. A very common technology that is used to sign requests over the Internet is called *OAuth*. You can read more about the OAuth protocol at www.oauth.net.

Thankfully there are a number of convenient and free OAuth libraries so you can avoid writing an OAuth implementation from scratch by reading the specification. These libraries are of varying complexity and have varying degrees of richness. The OAuth web site has information about various OAuth libraries.

13.8 Glossary

API Application Program Interface - A contract between applications that defines the patterns of interaction between two application components.

ElementTree A built-in Python library used to parse XML data.

JSON JavaScript Object Notation - A format that allows for the markup of structured data based on the syntax of JavaScript Objects.

SOA Service-Oriented Architecture - When an application is made of components connected across a network.

XML eXtensible Markup Language - A format that allows for the markup of structured data.

13.9 Google geocoding web service

Google has an excellent web service that allows us to make use of their large database of geographic information. We can submit a geographical search string like “Ann Arbor, MI” to their geocoding API and have Google return its best guess as to where on a map we might find our search string and tell us about the landmarks nearby.

The geocoding service is free but rate limited so you cannot make unlimited use of the API in a commercial application. But if you have some survey data where an end user has entered a location in a free-format input box, you can use this API to clean up your data quite nicely.

When you are using a free API, you need to be respectful in your use of these resources. If too many people abuse the service, Google might drop or significantly curtail its free service.

The following is a simple application to prompt the user for a search string, call the Google geocoding API, and extract information from the returned JSON.

Appendix A

Contributions

A.1 Translations

This book has been translated into a number of languages which can be found at <https://www.py4e.com/book>.

- Spanish - Python para todos: Explorando la información con Python 3 - Translated book, autograders, resources, and web site at <https://es.py4e.com> Contributors: Juan Carlos Perez Castellanos, Juan Dougnac, Daniel Merino Echeverría, Jaime Bermeo Ramírez and Fernando Tardío.
- Italian Python per tutti: Esplorare dati con Python3 Contributors: Alessandro Rossetti and Vittore Zen
- Portuguese - Python Para Todos: Explorando Dados com Python 3 Translation: Yuri Loia de Medeiros
- Polish - Python dla wszystkich: Odkrywanie danych z Python 3 Translated book, autograders, resources, and web site at <https://py4e.pl> Translation: Andrzej Wójtowicz (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland)
- Greek - Translated book, autograders, resources, and web site at <https://gr.py4e.com> Translation: Konstantia Kiourtidou
- Arabic - Translation: Electronics Go

Anyone who is given permission to translate the book agrees to provide a free copy of the book online. Some of the translations are available in print and available for purchase.

A.2 Contributor List for Python for Everybody

The source for the book is maintained in `github` and you can find numerous contributors for the book who find and suggest fixes using pull requests.

<https://github.com/csev/py4e/>

Look under **Insights** -> **Contributors** to see all the folks who have contributed through **github**.

Juan Carlos Perez Castellanos, Juan Dougnac, Daniel Merino Echeverría, Jaime Bermeo Ramírez, Fernando Tardío, Alessandro Rossetti, Vittore Zen, Yuri Loia de Medeiros, Konstantia Kiourtidou, Andrzej Wójtowicz, Elliott Hauser, Stephen Catto, Sue Blumenberg, Tamara Brunnock, Mihaela Mack, Chris Kolosiwsky, Dustin Farley, Jens Leerssen, Naveen KT, Mirza Ibrahimovic, Naveen (@togarnk), Zhou Fangyi, Alistair Walsh, Erica Brody, Jih-Sheng Huang, Louis Luangkesorn, and Michael Fudge

You can see contribution details at:

<https://github.com/csev/py4e/graphs/contributors>

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A.4 Preface for “Think Python”

A.4.1 The strange history of “Think Python”

(Allen B. Downey)

In January 1999 I was preparing to teach an introductory programming class in Java. I had taught it three times and I was getting frustrated. The failure rate in the class was too high and, even for students who succeeded, the overall level of achievement was too low.

One of the problems I saw was the books. They were too big, with too much unnecessary detail about Java, and not enough high-level guidance about how to program. And they all suffered from the trap door effect: they would start out easy, proceed gradually, and then somewhere around Chapter 5 the bottom would fall out. The students would get too much new material, too fast, and I would spend the rest of the semester picking up the pieces.

Two weeks before the first day of classes, I decided to write my own book. My goals were:

- Keep it short. It is better for students to read 10 pages than not read 50 pages.

- Be careful with vocabulary. I tried to minimize the jargon and define each term at first use.
- Build gradually. To avoid trap doors, I took the most difficult topics and split them into a series of small steps.
- Focus on programming, not the programming language. I included the minimum useful subset of Java and left out the rest.

I needed a title, so on a whim I chose *How to Think Like a Computer Scientist*.

My first version was rough, but it worked. Students did the reading, and they understood enough that I could spend class time on the hard topics, the interesting topics and (most important) letting the students practice.

I released the book under the GNU Free Documentation License, which allows users to copy, modify, and distribute the book.

What happened next is the cool part. Jeff Elkner, a high school teacher in Virginia, adopted my book and translated it into Python. He sent me a copy of his translation, and I had the unusual experience of learning Python by reading my own book.

Jeff and I revised the book, incorporated a case study by Chris Meyers, and in 2001 we released *How to Think Like a Computer Scientist: Learning with Python*, also under the GNU Free Documentation License. As Green Tea Press, I published the book and started selling hard copies through Amazon.com and college book stores. Other books from Green Tea Press are available at greenteapress.com.

In 2003 I started teaching at Olin College and I got to teach Python for the first time. The contrast with Java was striking. Students struggled less, learned more, worked on more interesting projects, and generally had a lot more fun.

Over the last five years I have continued to develop the book, correcting errors, improving some of the examples and adding material, especially exercises. In 2008 I started work on a major revision—at the same time, I was contacted by an editor at Cambridge University Press who was interested in publishing the next edition. Good timing!

I hope you enjoy working with this book, and that it helps you learn to program and think, at least a little bit, like a computer scientist.

A.4.2 Acknowledgements for “Think Python”

(Allen B. Downey)

First and most importantly, I thank Jeff Elkner, who translated my Java book into Python, which got this project started and introduced me to what has turned out to be my favorite language.

I also thank Chris Meyers, who contributed several sections to *How to Think Like a Computer Scientist*.

And I thank the Free Software Foundation for developing the GNU Free Documentation License, which helped make my collaboration with Jeff and Chris possible.

I also thank the editors at Lulu who worked on *How to Think Like a Computer Scientist*.

I thank all the students who worked with earlier versions of this book and all the contributors (listed in an Appendix) who sent in corrections and suggestions.

And I thank my wife, Lisa, for her work on this book, and Green Tea Press, and everything else, too.

Allen B. Downey
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A.5 Contributor List for “Think Python”

(Allen B. Downey)

More than 100 sharp-eyed and thoughtful readers have sent in suggestions and corrections over the past few years. Their contributions, and enthusiasm for this project, have been a huge help.

For the detail on the nature of each of the contributions from these individuals, see the “Think Python” text.

Lloyd Hugh Allen, Yvon Boulianne, Fred Bremmer, Jonah Cohen, Michael Conlon, Benoit Girard, Courtney Gleason and Katherine Smith, Lee Harr, James Kaylin, David Kershaw, Eddie Lam, Man-Yong Lee, David Mayo, Chris McAloon, Matthew J. Moelter, Simon Dicon Montford, John Ouzts, Kevin Parks, David Pool, Michael Schmitt, Robin Shaw, Paul Sleigh, Craig T. Snyder, Ian Thomas, Keith Verheyden, Peter Winstanley, Chris Wrobel, Moshe Zadka, Christoph Zwerschke, James Mayer, Hayden McAfee, Angel Arnal, Tauhidul Hoque and Lex Berezhny, Dr. Michele Alzetta, Andy Mitchell, Kalin Harvey, Christopher P. Smith, David Hutchins, Gregor Lingl, Julie Peters, Florin Oprina, D. J. Webre, Ken, Ivo Wever, Curtis Yanko, Ben Logan, Jason Armstrong, Louis Cordier, Brian Cain, Rob Black, Jean-Philippe Rey at Ecole Centrale Paris, Jason Mader at George Washington University made a number Jan Gundtofte-Bruun, Abel David and Alexis Dinno, Charles Thayer, Roger Sperberg, Sam Bull, Andrew Cheung, C. Corey Capel, Alessandra, Wim Champagne, Douglas Wright, Jared Spindor, Lin Peiheng, Ray Hagtvedt, Torsten Hübsch, Inga Petuhhov, Arne Babenhauserheide, Mark E. Casida, Scott Tyler, Gordon Shephard, Andrew Turner, Adam Hobart, Daryl Hammond and Sarah Zimmerman, George Sass, Brian Bingham, Leah Engelbert-Fenton, Joe Funke, Chao-chao Chen, Jeff Paine, Lubos Pintes, Gregg Lind and Abigail Heithoff, Max Hailperin, Chotipat Pornavalai, Stanislaw Antol, Eric Pashman, Miguel Azevedo, Jianhua Liu, Nick King, Martin Zuther, Adam Zimmerman, Ratnakar Tiwari, Anurag Goel, Kelli Kratzer, Mark Griffiths, Roydan Ongie, Patryk Wolowiec, Mark Chonofsky, Russell Coleman, Wei Huang, Karen Barber, Nam Nguyen, Stéphane Morin, Fernando Tardio, and Paul Stoop.

Appendix B

Copyright Detail

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Charles Severance
www.dr-chuck.com
Ann Arbor, MI, USA
September 9, 2013

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