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Daily Coding Problem #126

Problem

This problem was asked by Facebook.

Write a function that rotates a list by k elements. For example, [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6] rotated by two becomes [3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2]. Try solving this without creating a copy of the list. How many swap or move operations do you need?

Solution

We can naively rotate a list without creating a copy by simply moving each element down by one, k times. Don't forget to wrap around:

```
def rotate(lst, k):  
    for _ in range(k):  
        # Move each element down by one.  
        first_element = lst[0]  
        for i in range(len(lst) - 1):  
            lst[i] = lst[i + 1]
```

```
lst[len(lst) - 1] = first_element
return lst
```

Although this takes constant space, this will take $O(nk)$ time. Can we do this any faster?

We can view this problem as transforming the list into $lst[k:] + lst[:k]$. By reversing these subarrays and then reversing the whole array we can effectively rotate the array in linear time and without copying.

Take our example, $[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]$ and $k = 2$.

- First reverse from 0 to k: $[2, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6]$
- Then reverse from k to n: $[2, 1, 6, 5, 4, 3]$
- Then reverse from 0 to n: $[3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2]$

```
def rotate(lst, k):
    reverse(lst, 0, k - 1)
    reverse(lst, k, len(lst) - 1)
    reverse(lst, 0, len(lst) - 1)

def reverse(lst, i, j):
    while i < j:
        lst[i], lst[j] = lst[j], lst[i]
        i += 1
        j -= 1
```

Since reversing a list takes $O(n)$ and we do a constant number of reversals (3), this algorithm takes $O(n)$ time.

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