Paper Title: Exploring Apache Airflow for Enhanced Workflow Management and Error Handling in Scheduling Apache Spark Jobs: A Case Study in Stock Prediction

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Team Members: Chuong Nguyen – Zhen Cao

Abstract: This paper investigates the utility of Apache Airflow for scheduling Apache Spark jobs, emphasizing workflow optimization and error management. Focusing on stock prediction as a case study, we explore Airflow's Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs) and demonstrate their effectiveness in automating task scheduling and error handling. By integrating data collection, preprocessing, and machine learning model deployment, we showcase how Airflow streamlines workflow management, facilitating more informed investment decisions. Through this research, we highlight the potential of Airflow in enhancing efficiency and reliability in big data analytics workflows.

Table of Contents

| I. | Introduction | 1 |
|------|---|----|
| Α. | . Background | 1 |
| В. | . Motivation | 1 |
| C. | . Objectives | 2 |
| II. | Apache Airflow | 2 |
| Α. | . Overview of Workflow Management Systems | 2 |
| В. | . Apache Airflow | 2 |
| C. | . Limitations | 5 |
| D. | . Conclusion | 5 |
| III. | Demo: Stock Prediction | 5 |
| A. | . Overview of the demo | 5 |
| В. | . Dataset | 6 |
| C. | . Environment Setups | 6 |
| D. | . Apache Airflow DAG | 12 |
| E. | Running DAG in Airflow UI | 13 |
| F. | Apache Airflow in Google Cloud | 14 |
| G. | . Results | 22 |
| IV. | Conclusion | 23 |
| V. | References | 24 |

I. Introduction

A. Background

Apache Airflow is a management platform first engineered by Airbnb in 2014 to support internal work. The platform offers a more effective and efficient solution for dealing with complex data engineering workflows. Specifically, it allows pipelines with multiple tasks and stages to be scheduled and arranged using Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs). DAG designers and users can robustly schedule, edit, debug, or create plans for every task within the pipeline in case of failure or error (Airflow, 2024).

The Airflow project was initiated in late 2014 and has been an open-source project since day one. The software was first made public on Airbnb's GitHub with the first commit in June 2015. Subsequently, the project became part of the Apache Software Foundation in 2016, and updates are still being released every three months. (Airflow, 2024)

B. Motivation

Has Moore's Law truly ended? After a long 60-year reign through the digital era and the evolution of the World Wide Web, the assertion about the development of technology is now being questioned, as it may no longer be able to keep up with the burgeoning of data (Tardi, 2024). The theory is not being questioned due to any invalid impacts, but rather because the explosion of data has created an enormous demand for data storage and processing power.

In particular, with the foundation from the previous era, the World Wide Web advanced into the new century at a rapid pace. Web 2.0 facilitated social connectivity worldwide, and Web 3.0 offers even more variety in access points. This means that people can not only reach others from everywhere around the globe but also from anywhere, such as on a computer, cell phone, or tablet. Many companies foresaw the rising demand and innovated great services to satisfy these new ideas, such as buying books from the comfort of one's couch, connecting with friends thousands of miles away, or advertising houses to tourists with whom they have no connection. To support these advanced technologies, distributed computing, cloud services, and diverse data sources had to be established in the back end, in other words, data decentralization came up introducing new complexity and challenges in managing and orchestrating data workflow. As a result, companies and their best scientists had to come up with better tools and strategies to maintain phenomenal growth or risk being left behind.

Among all, Apache Airflow, created by Airbnb, is one of the most popular workflow management platforms in the data engineering and data science communities. The vast majority of companies from various industries are adopting and utilizing Apache Airflow to improve their workflows, demonstrating the power of this software platform.

C. Objectives

In this paper, we will explore and showcase the benefits of Apache Airflow through a simple project aimed at predicting potential stocks using data from Yahoo Finance. The process begins with downloading data from the financial platform's API using a Python library called Yfinance. The data is expected to be downloaded daily to track the performance of the stocks and saved in two separate databases on a local machine in PostgreSQL. Several machine learning models will be trained and then utilized to flag any upward patterns found from each day of data.

II. Apache Airflow

A. Overview of Workflow Management Systems

In general, Workflow Management is a systematic approach to optimizing and ensuring a series of steps required to complete a specific project are consistently and efficiently executed (Pratt, 2022). In a big data analysis project, the pipeline starts with collecting a large amount of data from one or multiple sources. Depending on the scale and requirements of the project, the raw data will need to be transformed and processed before being saved to a new database or added to an existing one on a local machine or on a cloud storage service, ready to be used in machine learning models or business intelligence applications.

B. Apache Airflow

In such complex pipelines, Apache Airflow stands out as a powerful system that provides dynamic and robust scheduling. Additionally, it offers a user-friendly platform for monitoring and management. It also remains highly up-to-date for being open-source and written in Python which is one of the most popular programming languages.

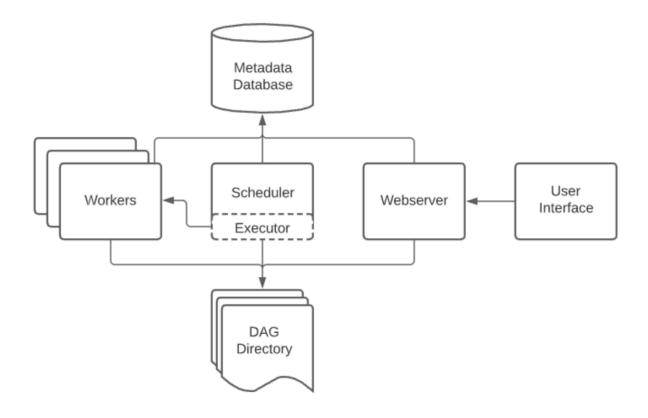


Image 1.1 – Core components in Apache Airflow infrastructure (Docs, Airflow components, 2024)

In Apache Airflow, the infrastructure includes four core components that work in a system to orchestrate and manage workflows seamlessly. First and foremost is the **Webserver**, a Flask server powered by Gunicorn, which serves as the gateway to the Airflow UI. Here, users can visualize, monitor, and manage their workflows with ease. The **Scheduler**, on the other hand, operates behind the scenes as a daemon, responsible for the critical task of job scheduling. As a multi-threaded Python process, it determines the timing and execution location for each task within the workflow. Supporting these functionalities is the **Database**, serving as the repository for all metadata related to Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs) and tasks. This could be any local DBMS including Postgres, MySQL, SQLite, etc., or cloud environment but it requires extra setups and third-party software. Lastly, the **Executor** serves as the engine for executing tasks within the scheduler, ensuring seamless workflow execution under diverse conditions.

Although Airflow has SequentialExecutor configured by default which runs locally and does not support parallelism, other executors support parallel task operation, thus, the platform may have multiple **workers**. As a result, efficiency issues may arise when a task instance occupies a worker while awaiting their upstream tasks or some certain conditions, leading to the worker becoming idle and wasting resources. In such cases, Airflow offers Deferrable operators and

triggers that can free up the workers for other tasks. Together, these components form the backbone of Airflow's infrastructure, enabling efficient and reliable workflow management for organizations of all sizes. (Docs, Airflow components, 2024)

The heart of the workflow orchestration is encapsulated in an Airflow Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG). A DAG serves as a dynamic pipeline where users can define a set of tasks that are organized in an order. Because a DAG is always a directed graph, there can be as many tasks as needed but each task must have at least one connection to either the task in front of it (upstream) or after it (downstream) (Airflow, 2024). Of course, tasks must not point back to themselves to avoid creating infinite loops. See the example in Image 1.2.

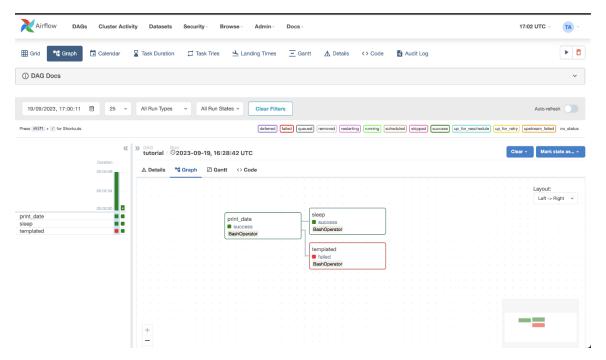


Image 1.2 – The status of the "demo" DAG in the web interface (Airflow, 2024)

All tasks in DAG can be visualized in Airflow UI similarly to a tree structure with each task as a node and the dependencies between them are vertices (Docs, Introduction to Airflow DAGs, 2024). What to do in each task at a specific point is determined by what operator it calls. There are various Airflow operators such as *PythonOperator*, *Bash Operator*, *KubenetesPodOperator*, *SnowflakeOperator*, etc. This means tasks in a DAG can be executed on multiple platforms and work with data from multiple sources.

Furthermore, a DAG can have its tasks run on different servers depending on which executor the user uses. To facilitate that, engineers came up with *Xcom*, which is a special way to push and pull for small amounts of data between tasks. For large data, *Xcom* can carry the link to the cloud bucket (e.g. S3 link) where the full data is saved. (Airflow, 2024)

C. Limitations

One of the most misleading myths about Airflow is that it is a tool to streamline data processing or simply handle data streams on a large scale (Yousry, 2023). This misconception is believed to originate from its capability to execute sophisticated multi-step pipelines. While the DAG structure holds all the power of Airflow, it also harbors an Achilles heel. The lack of a powerful mechanism to transfer data between tasks makes the workflow system weak against large-scale data. Users must save the data either on a local machine or in cloud storage, as Xcom was never designed to handle anything as large as a data frame. In other words, tasks in DAGs are completely isolated, and streaming data between them is extremely costly. Thus, unless the data has already been processed or there will be another tool to integrate, Airflow should not be the first option for streamlining data processing.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, Apache Airflow emerges as a robust and versatile solution for orchestrating complex workflows, offering dynamic scheduling, user-friendly monitoring, and management capabilities. In the next section, we will introduce a practical application of Apache Airflow by showcasing a simple stock prediction pipeline, and highlighting its effectiveness in real-world scenarios.

III. Demo: Stock Prediction

A. Overview of the demo

To explore and demonstrate Apache Airflow platform, we implemented a stock prediction pipeline. The pipeline included 6 steps:

- Step 1 Query stock information:
 - o Download stock data (APPL) from Yahoo Finance using the *yfinance* library.
 - Connect to a local DBMS (Postgres).
 - Create a table if not exist.
 - Clean the data by replacing null values and formatting data types for further processing.
 - Saves the cleaned data into a PostgreSQL database table named stock_info.
 - Push the new batch of data to XCom.
- Task 2 Subset the data for ML models:
 - Pull the raw stock data from XCom.
 - o Filter to include only necessary columns ['Stock_Name', 'Date', 'Open', 'Close'.
 - Save the data back into the PostgreSQL database table named processed_stock_data.
- Sensor Check if models exist in the S3 bucket using Minio.
 - Check if the trained models exist via Minio using S3KeySensor.
 - o If not, wait until the models are saved in the S3 bucket.
- Tasks 3, 4, 5 Load models and run predictions.
 - o Models: Linear regression, logistic regression, LSTM.
 - o Apply each model to the new data and return predictions.
 - Results are in binary values 1 for good performance and 0 for bad performance.
- Task 6 Make investment decisions

- Combine results from tasks 3, 4, and 5.
- o Decide outcome based on whether at least 2 out of 3 models return good performance.

B. Dataset

Our program will download the specified stocks dataset from Yahoo Finance. Here is an overview of the dataset:

- **stock_name**: The name of the stock on Yahoo Finance. For example, "apple" corresponds to the stock symbol "AAPL", and "Nvidia" corresponds to "NVDA".
- date: The date of the stock data entry.
- **open**: The opening price of the stock, which is the price at which the stock begins trading when the market opens for the day.
- **high**: The highest price of the stock during the trading day.
- **low**: The lowest price of the stock during the trading day.
- **close**: The closing price of the stock, which is the final price at which the stock is traded on the given trading day.
- **volume**: The total number of shares or contracts traded for the stock on that day.
- adj_close: The adjusted closing price of the stock, which is the final price adjusted before the next trading day.
- **short_ma**: The short-term moving average of a financial metric.
- long_ma: The long-term moving average of a financial metric.

This dataset provides valuable information about stock prices and trading volumes over time, along with additional calculated metrics such as moving averages.



C. Environment Setups

The demo is implemented in macOS. We used Apache Airflow version 2.8.3 in Docker 4.27.2 and programmed in Python 3.8.

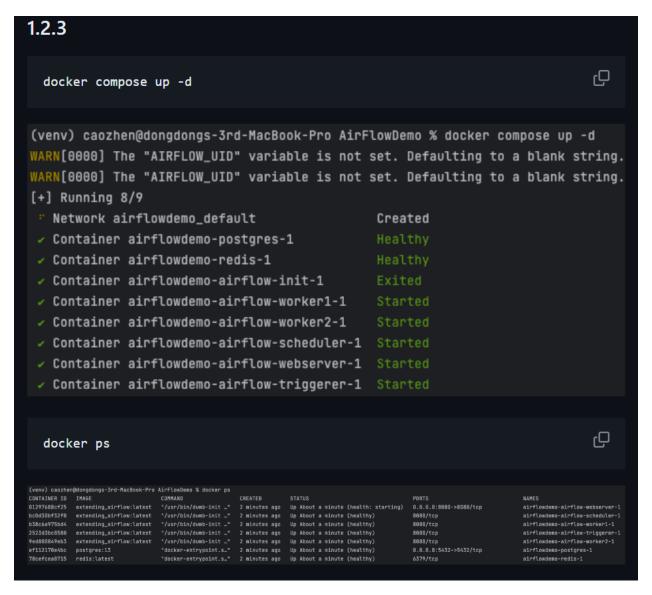
First, in docker-cmopose.yaml replace image and add ports: 5432:5432 to map the container's internal port 5432 to port 5432 on the host machine.

```
ĊЭ
# image: ${AIRFLOW_IMAGE_NAME:-apache/airflow:2.8.3}
image: ${AIRFLOW_IMAGE_NAME:-extending_airflow:latest}
  postgres:
    image: postgres:13
    environment:
      POSTGRES_USER: airflow
      POSTGRES_PASSWORD: airflow
      POSTGRES_DB: airflow
    volumes:
      - postgres-db-volume:/var/lib/postgresql/data
    ports:
      - 5432:5432
    healthcheck:
      test: [ "CMD", "pg_isready", "-U", "airflow" ]
      interval: 10s
      retries: 5
      start_period: 5s
    restart: always
```

Then, we builds a Docker image named **extending_airflow** and tags it as **latest**. It searches for a file named **Dockerfile** in the current directory and follows the instructions provided in that file to construct the image. Each command in the **Dockerfile**, such as **FROM**, **COPY**, **RUN**, etc., is executed to create the image with the required environment and application. Once the build is complete, the resulting image is labeled with the specified tag, which can be **latest** to indicate it as the most recent version.

```
dockerfile
  FROM apache/airflow:2.8.3
  COPY requirements.txt /requirements.txt
  RUN pip install --user --upgrade pip
  RUN pip install --no-cache-dir --user -r /requirements.txt
requirements.txt
                                                                            Q
  pandas==2.0.3
  yfinance==0.2.31
  psycopg2-binary
  scikit-learn==1.3.2
  numpy==1.23.5
  keras==2.13.1
  tensorflow==2.13.1
                                                                            Q
  docker build . --tag extending_airflow:latest
```

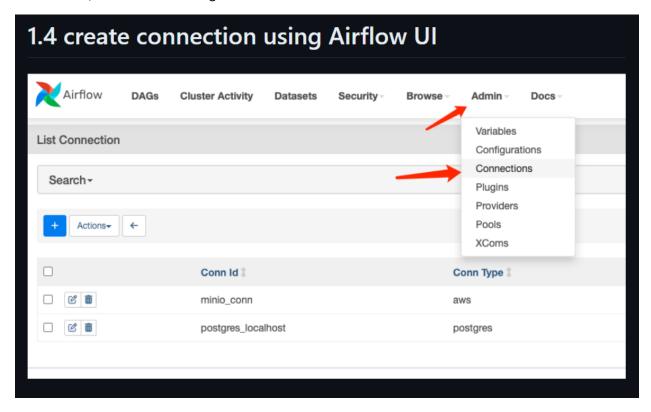
These screenshots show docker environment has been set up and connected to Airflow.

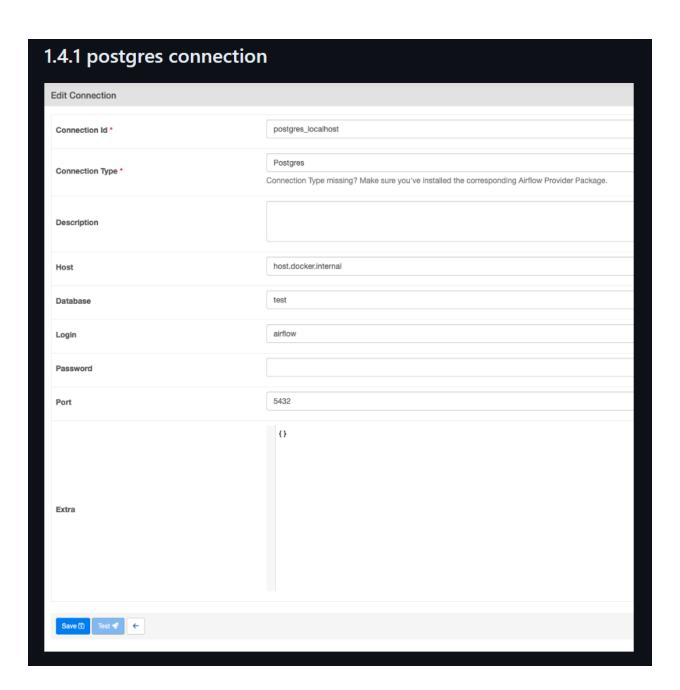


We also establish the connection to Minio to call our pre-trained models that were stored in S3 bucket.

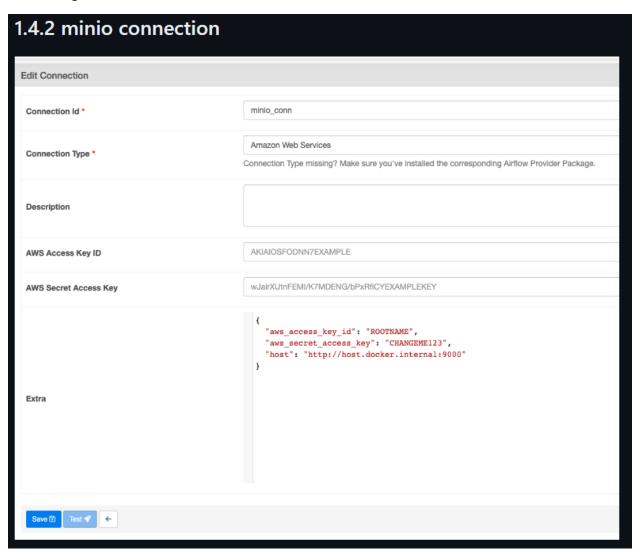
```
1.3 minio
                                                                                                                                                                                                                  ĊЪ
     mkdir -p ~/minio/data
     docker run \
              -p 9000:9000 \
              -p 9001:9001 \
              --name minio \
              -v ~/minio/data:/data \
              -e "MINIO_ROOT_USER=ROOTNAME" \
              -e "MINIO_ROOT_PASSWORD=CHANGEME123" \
              quay.io/minio/minio server /data --console-address ":9001"
CONTAINER ID IMAGE COMMAND 81297688cf25 extending_airflow:latest "/usr/bin/dumb-init .."
                                                                                    CREATED
                                                                                                                                                                                     NAMES
                                                                                   8 minutes ago Up 7 minutes (healthy)
8 minutes ago Up 7 minutes (healthy)
8 minutes ago Up 7 minutes (healthy)
bc8d38bf32f0 extending_airflow:latest "/usr/bin/dumb-init ..."
b38c6a975bd4 extending_airflow:latest "/usr/bin/dumb-init ..."
                                                                                                                                         8080/tcp
8080/tcp
                                                                                                                                                                                     airflowdemo-airflow-scheduler-1
airflowdemo-airflow-worker1-1
bascoary/bod4 extending_airflow:latest "/usr/bin/dumb-init ..." 8 minutes ago Up 7 minutes (healthy)
252333bo6889 extending_airflow:latest "/usr/bin/dumb-init ..." 8 minutes ago Up 7 minutes (healthy)
9cd8080849b3 extending_airflow:latest "/usr/bin/dumb-init ..." 8 minutes ago Up 7 minutes (healthy)
6f112170e4bc postpres:13 "docker-entryppints.s.." 8 minutes ago Up 8 minutes (healthy)
6cledcb72343 quay.io/minio/minio "/usr/bin/docker-ent..." 6 days ago Up 10 minutes
                                                                                                                                                                                     airflowdemo-airflow-worker2-1
                                                                                                                                         8888/tcp
                                                                                                                                                                                     airflowdemo-redis-1
                                                                                                                                         8.8.8:9888-9881->9888-9861/tcp minio
```

In Airflow UI, we connect to PostgreSQL DBMS in Admin tab.

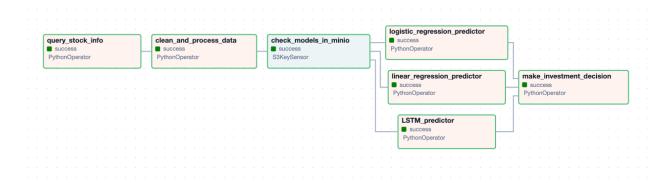




Establishing connection to Minio.



D. Apache Airflow DAG

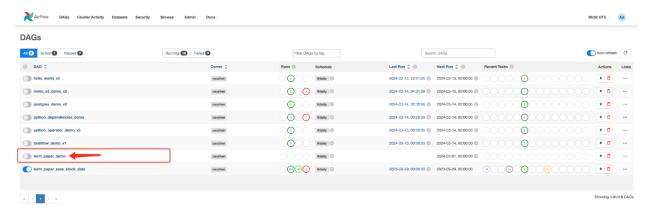


Declaring task dependencies:

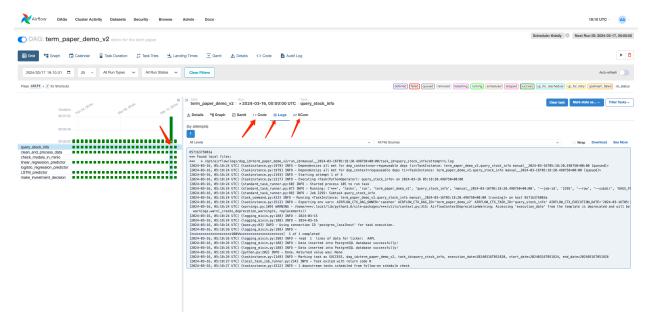
task1 >> task2 >> model_sensor >> [task3, task4, task5] >> task6

E. Running DAG in Airflow UI

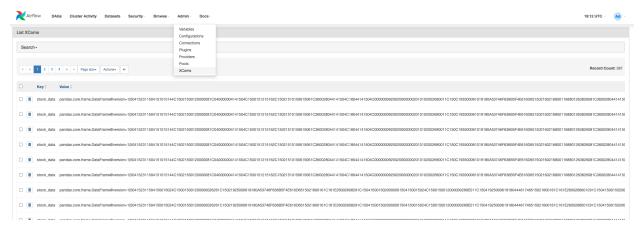
DAG found in directory and was ready to start.



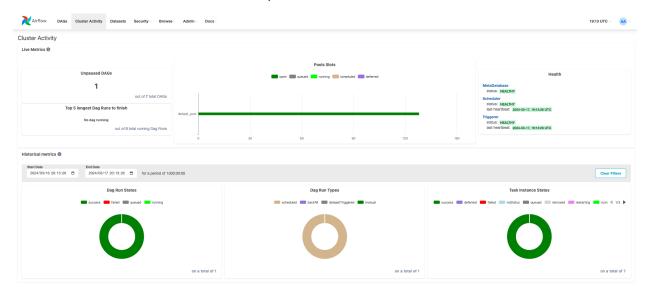
DAG ran successfully in Grid view with logs.



Immediate results of the raw stock data saved in XCom.



Monitor the workflow in the Cluster activity tab.



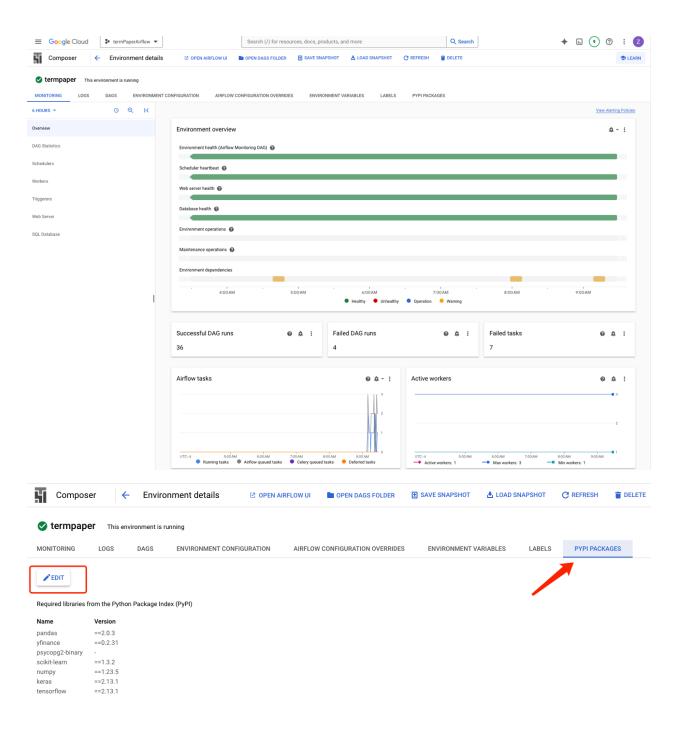
F. Apache Airflow in Google Cloud

I. Create composer (airflow on GC)

https://console.cloud.google.com/composer/

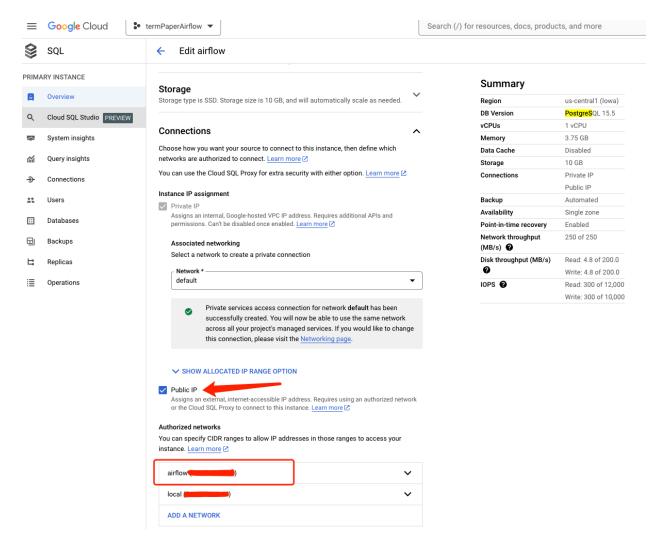


Create composer 2.

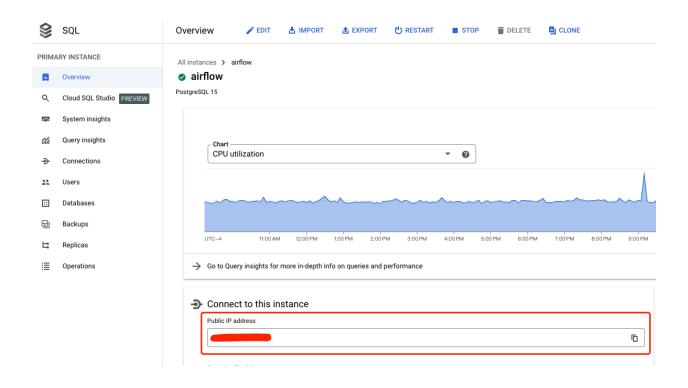


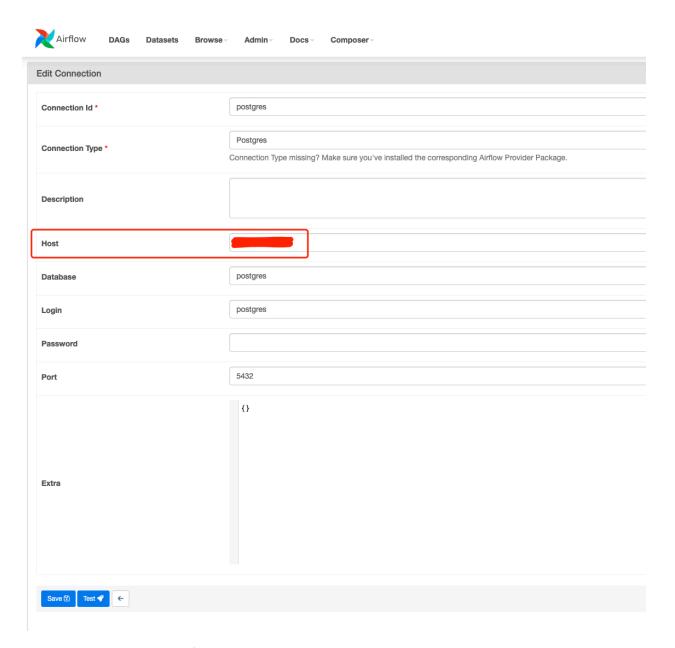
You can add python packages using PYPI. Then composer will download for you automatically.

II. Create Postgres database



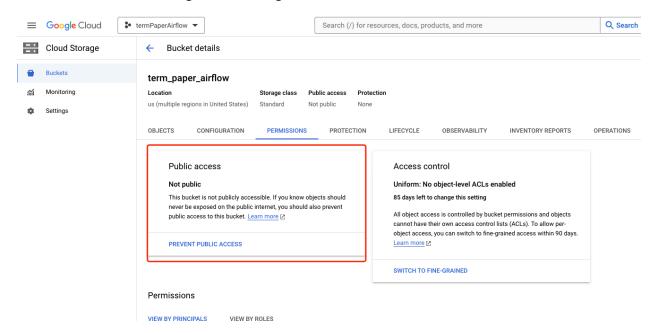
You need to add your airflow IP to authorized networks here.





And create connection in Airflow UI using the Postgres database public IP address.

III. Google Cloud Storage



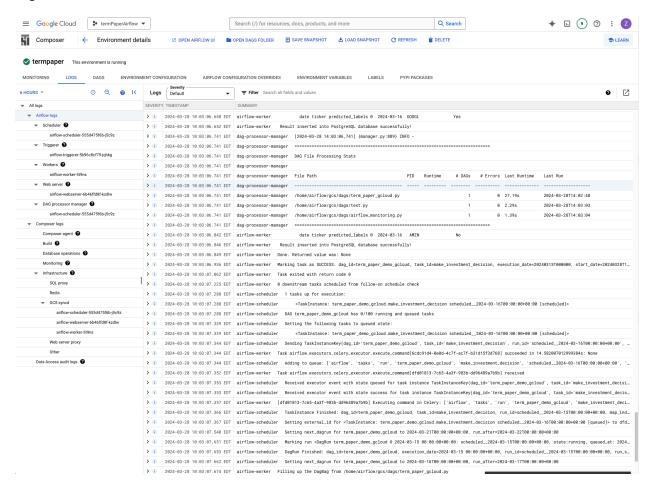
Here allow public access to the bucket and save the models in the bucket.

gcs_hook = GoogleCloudStorageHook(google_cloud_conn_id)
First download .h5 model file from bucket and then load model
model_stream = gcs_hook.download(bucket_name=bucket_name, object_name=model_key,
filename=f'/tmp/{model_key}')

Because we use GoogleCloudStorageHook to download the model.

IV. Composer Dashboard

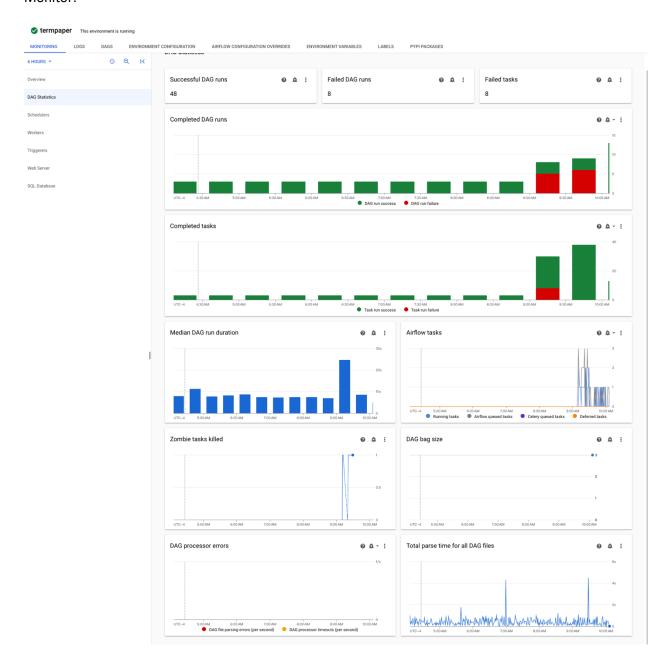
Logs:



Dags:



Monitor:



G. Results

Predictions are stored back into the PostgreSQL database. We can query the database to retrieve these predictions and compare them with the actual results. Below is an example query.

```
SELECT psd.date,

psd.stock_name,

psd.open,

psd.close,

sp.prediction,

(psd.close - psd.open) AS earning

FROM processed_stock_data psd

JOIN stock_prediction sp ON psd.date = sp.date AND psd.stock_name = sp.stock_name

WHERE psd.stock_name = 'NVDA';
```

| date | stock_name | open | close | prediction | earning |
|--|---|---|--|-----------------------------|---|
| 2024-03-08 | NVDA | 951.38 | 875.28 | Yes | -76.10000000000002 |
| 2024-03-11 | NVDA | 864.29 | 857.74 | Yes | -6.549999999999545 |
| 2024-03-12 | NVDA | 880.49 | 919.13 | No | 38.63999999999986 |
| 2024-03-13 | NVDA | 910.55 | 908.88 | No | -1.669999999999959 |
| 2024-03-14 | NVDA | 895.77 | 879.44 | No | -16.329999999999927 |
| 2024-03-15 | NVDA | 869.3 | 878.37 | Yes | 9.07000000000005 |
| 2024-03-18 | NVDA | 903.88 | 884.55 | Yes | -19.33000000000004 |
| 2024-03-19 | NVDA | 867 | 893.98 | No | 26.980000000000018 |
| 2024-03-20 | NVDA | 897.97 | 903.72 | No | 5.75 |
| date | stock_name | open | | | l•_ |
| | Stock_name | open | close | prediction | earning |
| 2024-03-08 | GOOGL | 134.21 | 135.41 | Yes | 1.199999999999886 |
| | _ | | 1 | | 1.199999999999886 |
| 2024-03-08 2024-03-11 2024-03-12 | GOOGL | 134.21 | 135.41 | Yes | |
| 2024-03-11 | GOOGL GOOGL | 134.21 136.13 | 135.41 137.67 | Yes Yes | 1.199999999999886 |
| 2024-03-11 2024-03-12 | GOOGL GOOGL | 134.21 136.13 137.03 | 135.41 137.67 138.5 | Yes Yes Yes | 1.1999999999999886 1.539999999999999 1.4699999999999989 |
| 2024-03-11 2024-03-12 2024-03-13 | GOOGL GOOGL GOOGL | 134.21 136.13 137.03 139 | 135.41 137.67 138.5 139.79 | Yes Yes Yes Yes | 1.1999999999999886 1.539999999999999 1.46999999999999999 0.789999999999999 |
| 2024-03-11 2024-03-12 2024-03-13 2024-03-14 2024-03-15 | GOOGL GOOGL GOOGL GOOGL | 134.21 136.13 137.03 139 141.19 | 135.41 137.67 138.5 139.79 143.1 | Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes | 1.199999999999886 1.5399999999999999 1.4699999999999999 0.7899999999999999 |
| 2024-03-11 2024-03-12 2024-03-13 2024-03-14 | GOOGL GOOGL GOOGL GOOGL GOOGL | 134.21 136.13 137.03 139 141.19 | 135.41 137.67 138.5 139.79 143.1 141.18 | Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes | 1.199999999999999999999999999999999999 |

| date | stock_name | open | close | prediction | earning |
|------------|------------|--------|--------|------------|----------------------|
| 2024-03-08 | AMZN | 176.44 | 175.35 | Yes | -1.090000000000034 |
| 2024-03-11 | AMZN | 174.31 | 171.96 | No | -2.3499999999999943 |
| 2024-03-12 | AMZN | 173.5 | 175.39 | No | 1.889999999999864 |
| 2024-03-13 | AMZN | 175.9 | 176.56 | Yes | 0.659999999999966 |
| 2024-03-14 | AMZN | 177.69 | 178.75 | No | 1.06000000000000023 |
| 2024-03-15 | AMZN | 176.64 | 174.42 | Yes | -2.219999999999999 |
| 2024-03-18 | AMZN | 175.8 | 174.48 | No | -1.32000000000000216 |
| 2024-03-19 | AMZN | 174.22 | 175.9 | Yes | 1.68000000000000068 |
| 2024-03-20 | AMZN | 176.14 | 178.15 | Yes | 2.0100000000000193 |

The rectangles highlight correct predictions when the labels "No" indicate negative earnings, and "Yes" indicate positive earnings.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has provided an in-depth exploration of Apache Airflow's capabilities in managing complex workflows, with a specific focus on scheduling Apache Spark jobs for stock prediction tasks. By leveraging Airflow's Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs), we demonstrated how workflow optimization and error handling can be effectively implemented. Through the case study of stock prediction, we showcased the seamless integration of data collection, preprocessing, model deployment, and investment decision-making within Airflow. Through this term paper, we explored the potential of Airflow in enhancing workflow efficiency and reliability in big data analytics scenarios. As companies continue in advancing through the challenges of handling large volumes of data, Apache Airflow proves to be a robust solution for orchestrating complex workflows and driving insights from data analysis tasks.

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