

## Exercise 6 – Regular expressions

### Objective

To become familiar with some of Python's regular expression tools and continue to practise with Python syntax and string handling.

### Questions

1. Write a Python script that will perform *basic* validation and formatting of UK postcodes.

The postcodes are read from file `postcodes.txt`. A skeleton script, **Ex6.py**, contains the necessary file handling code - you fill in the gaps at the **TODO (a)** comments. This script is also used for the second exercise (below), so ignore the **TODO(b)** comments for the time being.

Blank lines should be ignored.

The following formatting is to be done:

- Remove all new-lines, tabs, and spaces.
- Convert to uppercase.
- Insert a space before the final digit and 2 letters.

Print out all the reformatted postcodes.

### Hints:

- Keep it simple; don't try to do all the formatting on one line of code!
- Read the **TODO (a)** comments in the code skeleton - ignore those for part (b) for the time being.
- There are several ways to insert the space, the simplest is to use `re.sub` and a back-reference.
- Put regular expressions into raw strings.

2. Now, extend your script so that it performs *basic* pattern validation of each postcode (**TODO (b)** comments).

The input lines are only to contain a postcode, with no other text.

The format of a UK postcode is as follows:

One or two uppercase alphabetic characters,  
followed by:   between one and two digits,  
followed by:   an optional single uppercase alphabetic character,  
followed by:   a single space,  
followed by:   a single digit,  
followed by:   two uppercase alphabetic characters.

Alphabetic characters are those in the range A-Z.

Print out all the reformatted postcodes, indicating which are in error, and a count of valid and invalid codes at the end.

### Hints:

- Do the formatting first, and then test the resulting pattern.
- Read the TODO (b) comments in the code skeleton.
- Use a raw string for your regular expression.
- The test file has 25 valid and 5 invalid postcodes.

**If time allows...**

3. The area and district part of the postcode (the part before the space) can be validated by looking in file **validpc.txt**. This also records the country the area is in. We have not done the File IO chapter yet, but this is how you read an entire file into a list, one line per element:

```
valid = open('validpc.txt', 'r').read().splitlines()
```

Modify your code to search for the area-district captured from your regular expression, and output which country the postcode belongs to. We suggest the following steps:

- a) Read **validpc.txt** and store it into a dictionary, where the key is the area-district and the value is the country. So, using the statement given above, you need to write a **'for'** loop to generate the dictionary:  
for txt in valid:  
    # Split up the line around a comma, etc...
- b) Alter your main regular expression to capture the relevant part of the postcode.
- c) If the postcode matches the RE, look it up in the dictionary and report which country it belongs to, or an error message if it is not there.

## Solutions

```
import re

infile = open('postcodes.txt', 'r')

valid = 0
invalid = 0

for postcode in infile:
    # Ignore empty lines.
    if postcode.isspace(): continue

    # (a): Remove newlines, tabs and spaces.
    postcode = re.sub('[\t\n]', '', postcode)

    # (a): Convert to uppercase.
    postcode = postcode.upper()

    # (a): Insert a space before the final digit and 2 letters.
    postcode = re.sub('([0-9][A-Z]{2})$', r'\1 ', postcode)

    # Print the reformatted postcode.
    print(postcode)

    # (b) Validate the postcode, returning a match object.
    m = re.search(r'^[A-Z]{1,2}[0-9]{1,2}[A-Z]? [0-9][A-Z]{2}$',
                  postcode)
    if m:
        valid += 1
    else:
        invalid += 1
```

```
infile.close()
```

```
# (b) Print the valid and invalid totals.
```

```
print(valid, 'valid codes and', invalid, 'invalid codes')
```

**If time allows:**

Here's the additional code:

```
# Part c
valid_dict = {}
valid = open('validpc.txt', 'r').read().splitlines()
for txt in valid:
    line = txt.split(',')
    valid_dict[line[0]] = line[1]
valid = None
# End of valid_dict initialisation.
```

...

```
# Note the extra parentheses.
m = re.search (r'^([A-Z]{1,2}[0-9]{1,2}[A-Z]?)[0-9][A-Z]{2}$',
               postcode)

if m:
    valid += 1
    # Part c
    area_district = m.group(1) # Or alternatively m.groups(1)[0]

    if area_district in valid_dict:
        print(postcode, 'is in', valid_dict[area_district])
    else:
        print(postcode, 'not found')
else:
    invalid += 1
```