Menpo Playground FAQs

What is the Menpo Playground?

The Menpo Playground is a single directory that you can download which contains the latest stable version of The Menpo Project. Download and unpack one `.zip` or `.tar.xz` file, and you instantly have access to:

1. A full isolated Python installation containing the Menpo Project with all its dependencies ready to go
2. A set of notebooks that you can run immediately to see how to use Menpo
3. Two command line tools, `menpofit`, and `menpodetect`, that can be used to locate bounding boxes and landmarks in challenging in-the-wild facial images.

There is no installation step, you just run executables in the downloaded folder. To remove, simply delete the folder.

Who is Menpo Playground for?

Menpo Playground is ideal for people who are completely new to Python and are interested to try out Menpo, perhaps for it's command line tools and useful pre-built facial models. It replicates the experience of downloading a traditional piece of software, running `make`, and having a bunch of 'executables' ready to play with.

It's also useful for more advanced users as a convenient method to generate a clean install of the latest stable version of menpo that is not only unrelated to the system Python, but even unrelated to any existing conda installation. Menpo Playground essentially runs the same bootstrapping script we use when performing Continuous Integration (CI) testing, so if you are worried you have in any way borked your existing menpo installation, it can be convenient to download Menpo Playground to get a clean slate to test something out in.

Wait, so is this the preferred way to install Menpo?

If you don't have a clue about Python and want to play with Menpo as soon as possible, yes. If you are a experienced Python user, **no**. You should just use conda as normal and conda install menpo.

Why would I not just use this though? What's the benefit of having a proper conda installation?

Once you have been using Python a little you will realize that the structure of conda (or virtualenv) where you have multiple isolated environments that can be easily switched between is really valuable. You'll also want all those utilities to be on your path at all times, so you don't have to live out of one folder on your system like a hermit. Then you'll get to grips with installing development versions of packages so you can edit them to contribute back to the community. You'll discover git and it will transform the way you conduct your work or research.

One day all this will make sense and you will want to maintain a global conda install to make your life easier. Until then, Menpo Playground is here.

Why are you making another mechanism for Python installation? Isn't it confusing enough as it is?

Menpo Playground is **not a new way to install a general Python installation**. We aren't reinventing the wheel (tehe) here. If you are already experienced with Python then feel free to `conda install -c menpo menpoproject` and be glad that we have built all our binary dependencies so everything just works on Linux Windows and OS X. If you really want to `pip install menpo` you can, but you'll have a real fight on your hands to get all our binary dependencies intalled. (Seriously, don't fight it, just use conda).

Our project unfortunately lies at the interaction of having very challenging dependencies to install (hence our insistence on conda) and appealing to people who may be completely new to the Python community. A researcher who has solely used Matlab for 20 years is going to understandably be intimidated by having to setup a 'correct' Python environment to just try and call `menpofit`'s assortment of excellent face alignment techniques. Menpo Playground lowers the barrier to entry considerably so we can welcome in such users. Maybe they will see the light and embark upon learning about how to use Python correctly - that's great, one day they won't need Menpo Playground any more.

Can I move the Menpo Playground folder?

Sure, put it where you like.

Can I put my .py files and notebooks inside it?

Sure, the top level of the playground folder is an ideal place to put simple scripts and notebooks. Just don't place anything or edit anything inside the `src` folder - you may want to blow this away in the future.

Can I upgrade to newer versions of the Menpo Project?

To upgrade, just download a new copy of the Menpo Playground from menpo.org, and copy any custom notebooks and scripts over.

Can I use development versions of Menpo?

No. Well, you can, but we aren't encouraging that. If you want to use development builds of Menpo then you really should be managing a proper conda installation.

Can I install other Python packages?

Not at this time. The price we pay for making a relocatable Python install is that it's hard to edit the

Python install once it's unpacked at an arbitrary location on your hard drive. We might revisit this in the future and improve upon it, but for now if you want to install custom software with Menpo we recommend following our proper conda installation instructions.