Introduction to Python

Demitri Muna
NYU

23 July 2012

Introduction to Python

- No experience with Python is necessary, but we're assuming you've written programs before.
- Using Python 2.6 or higher. Can test your Python version with:

```
% python --version
```

- Python 3.0 is out. It breaks some old code (not much), but most people are still on 2.6.
- Language is continually being updated and modified. More libraries are being added, both in the language and by third parties.
- Try out the examples as we go through them.

Hello World

The simplest application:

I left space to explain the code, but...

Run as:

```
% python hello_world.py
```

or, make it an executable:

```
% chmod +x hello_world.py
% hello_world.py
```

tells OS what to run the program with

Numbers

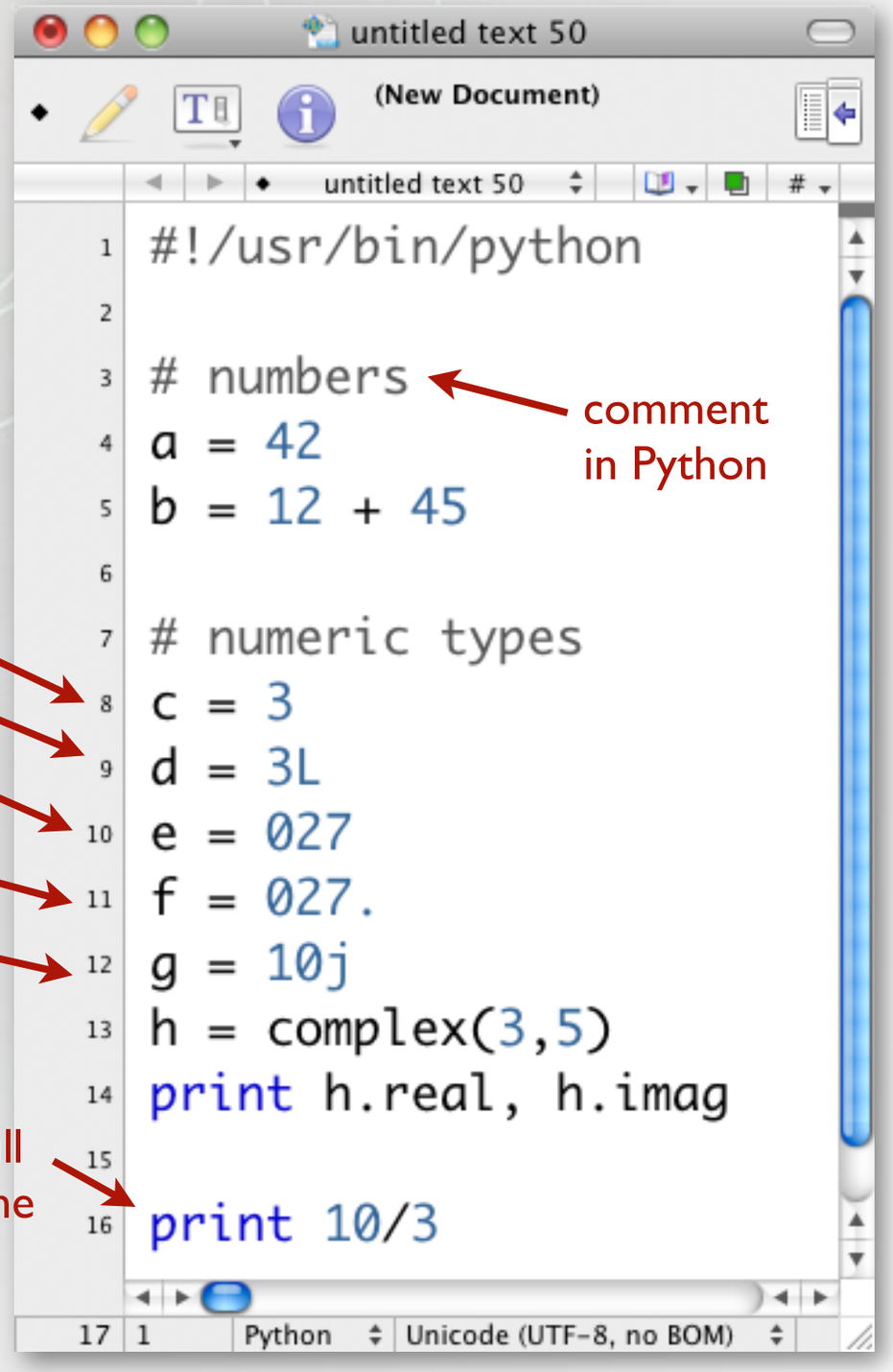
Assigning variables, familiar syntax.

Numeric types
integer
long integer
octal (base 8)
decimal
complex

"long" integers can be any length!

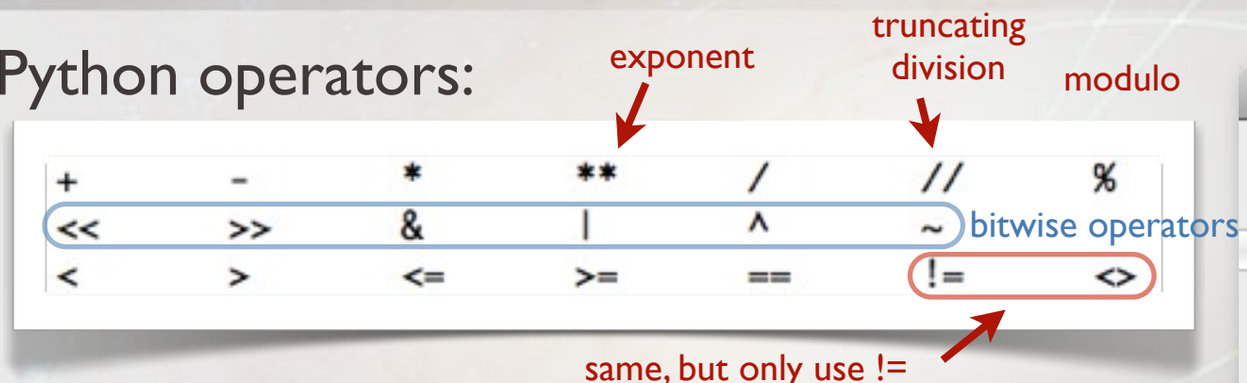
Don't write numbers with leading zeros -- they become octal!

Append a "j" to a number to make it complex (engineers use "j", physicists use "i" for $\sqrt{-1}$).



Numbers

Python operators:

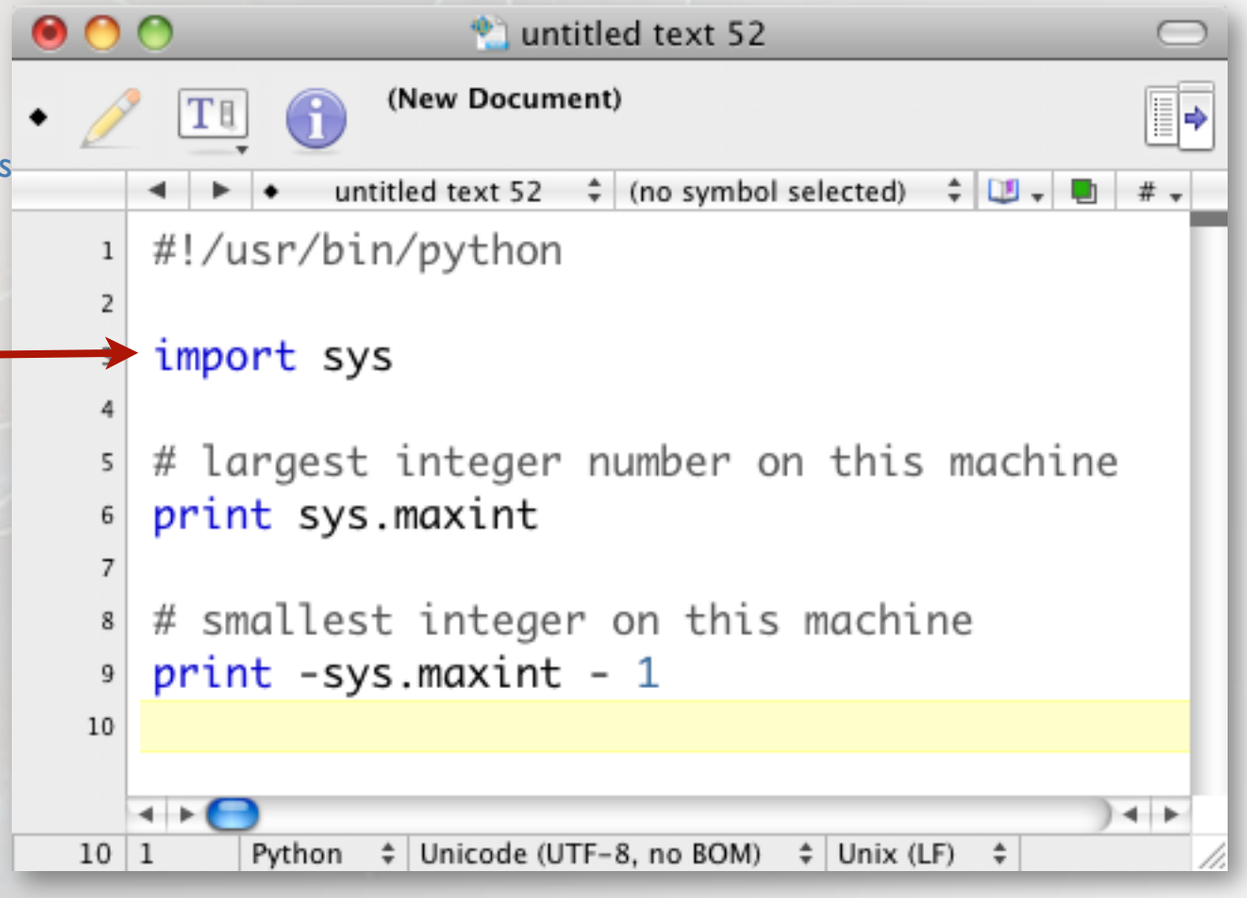


`import`

This command makes an external package available for additional functionality. This one is built into python.

Note the format of `moduleName.value` (or function)

(This keeps the runtime light since you are only loading the functionality that you use.)



You will get a different result running on a 32-bit vs a 64-bit machine (something to be aware of when running your code in different places.)

Truncating Division

In most languages, we expect: `10/3` ⟶ `3` operands are integers, result is an integer

Python 2.x

```
>>> 10/3
3
>>> 10//3
3
>>> 10./3.
3.3333333333333333
>>> 10/3.
3.3333333333333333

>>> from __future__ import division
>>> 10/3
3.3333333333333333
>>> 10//3
3
```

Can't wait for Python 3?

Python 3.x

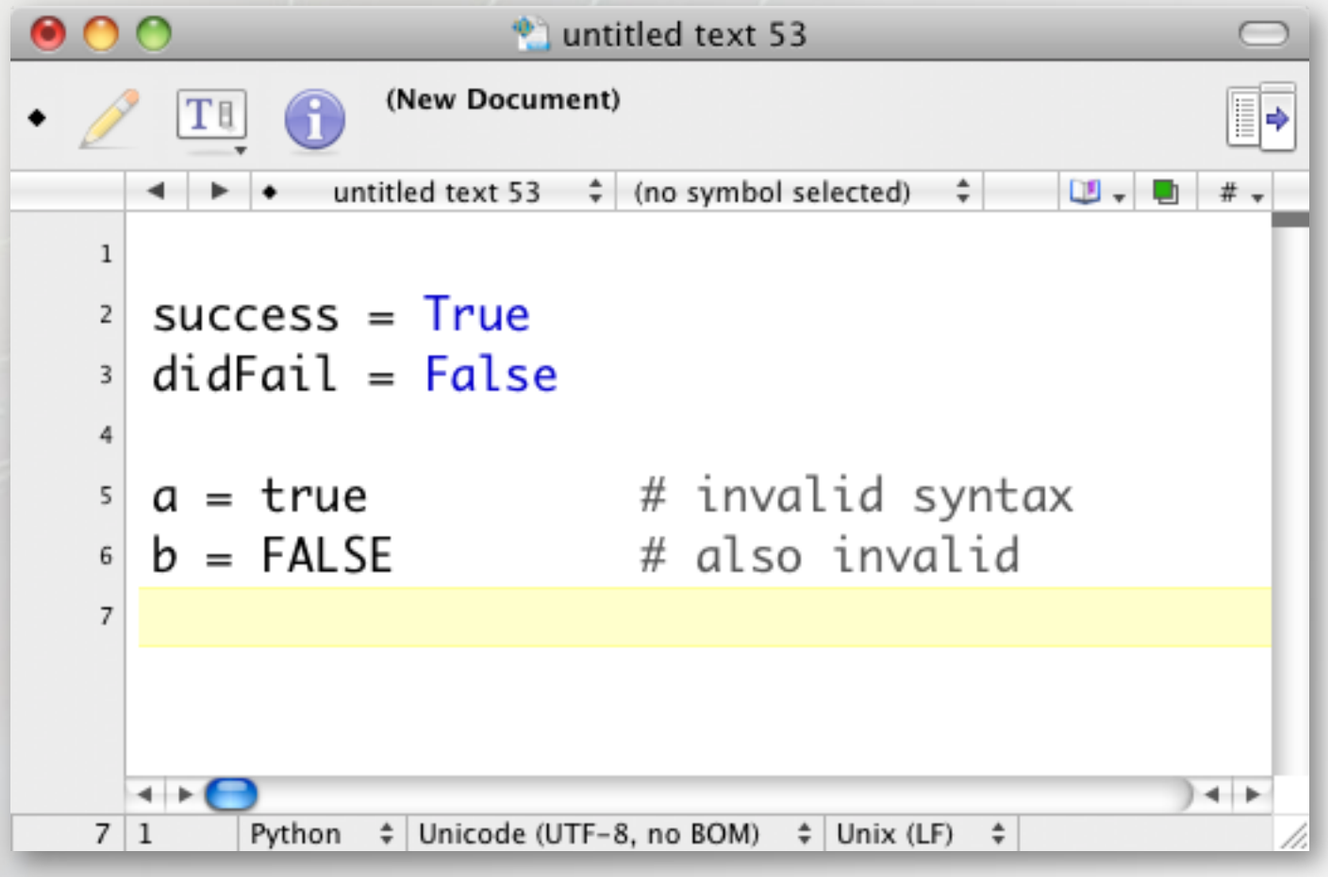
```
>>> 10/3
3.3333333333333333
>>> 10//3
3
```

In some instances, future features are available in earlier versions, but need to be turned on.

Boolean Values

Boolean values (True/False) are native types in Python.

The capitalization is important.

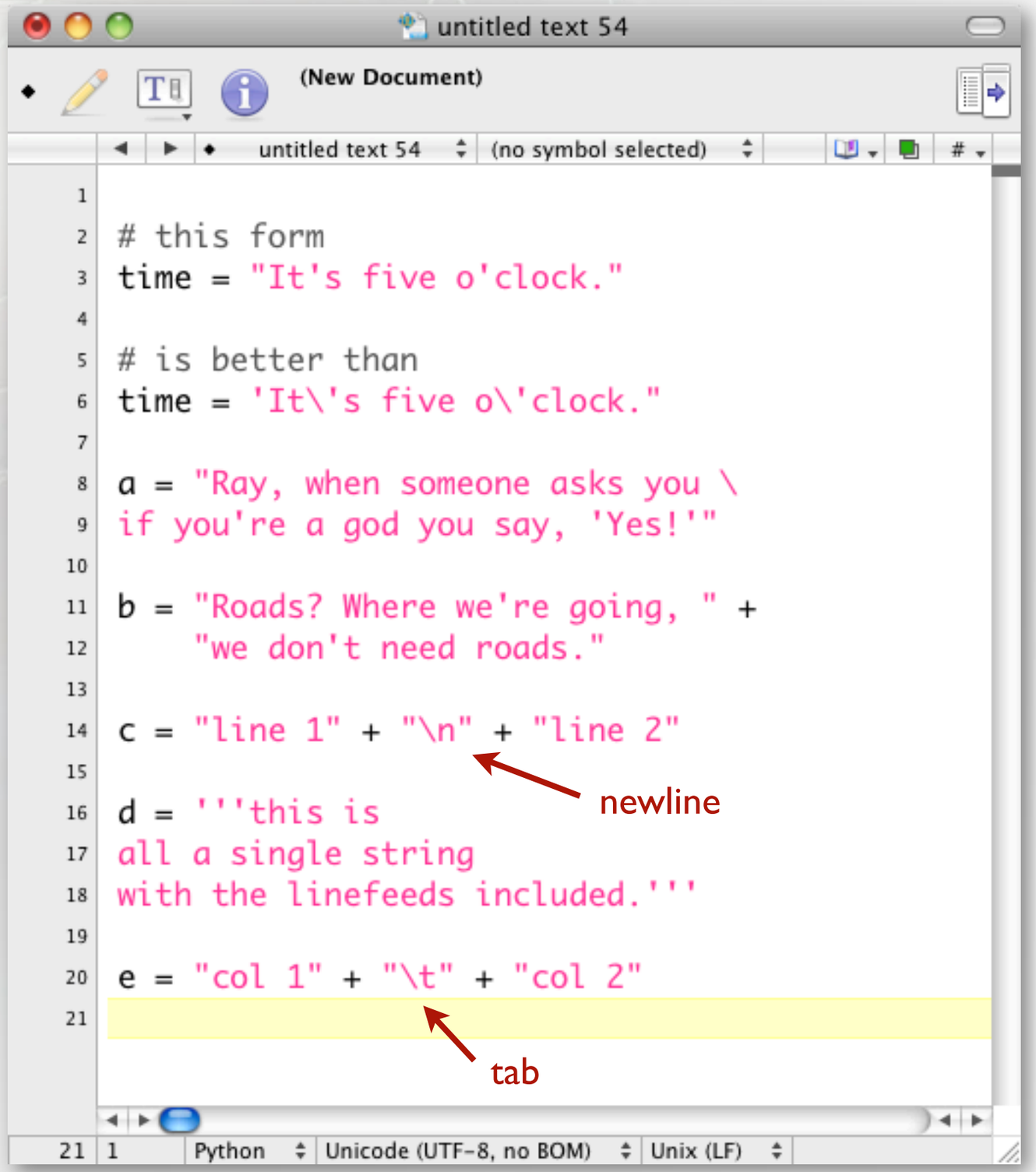


Strings

Strings can be delimited using single quotes, double quotes, or triple quotes. Use whatever is convenient to avoid having to escape quote characters with a "\".

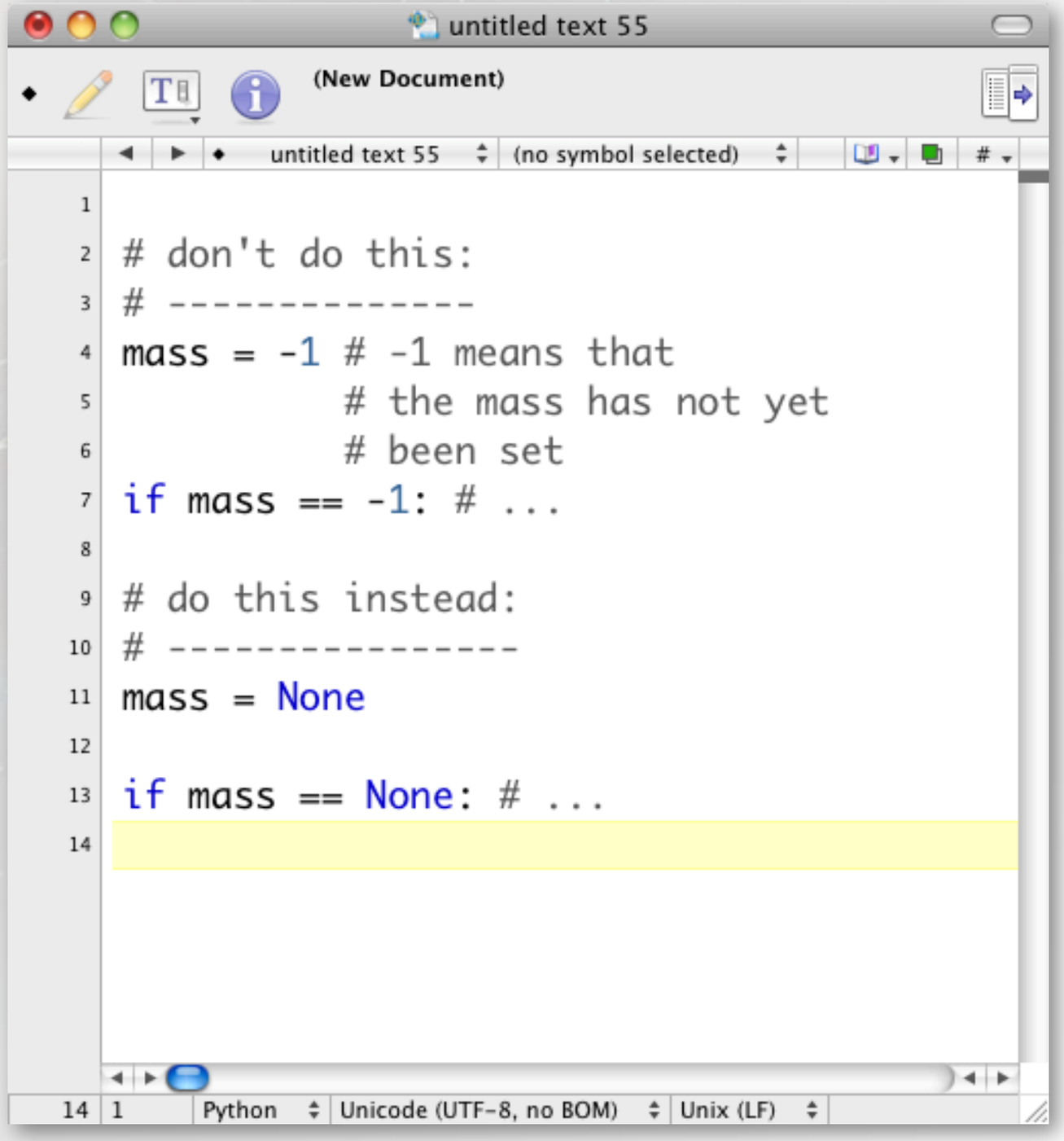
Strings can be joined together with the "+" operator.

Triple quotes are special in that they let you span multiple lines. Can be three single quotes or three double quotes.



None

`None` is a special value that indicates null. Use this, for example, to indicate a variable has not yet been set or has no value rather than some number that has to be "interpreted".



Containers – Tuples and Lists

Tuples

Groups of items
Can mix types
Can't be changed once created (immutable)

```
a = (1,2,3)
b = tuple() # empty tuple
c = ('a', 1, 3.0, None)
```

Lists

a.k.a. arrays
Can mix types
Mutable
Lists, as proper OO objects, have built-in methods.

```
a = [5,3,6,True,5,5]
b = list() # new, empty list

# add items to a list
b.append(86)
b.append(99)

print len(b) # number of items in b

a.sort() # sort elements in place
a.reverse() # reverse elements in place
a.count(5) # number of times "5" appears in list

print a.sort() # returns "None"
print sorted(a) # does not modify a
print sorted(a, reverse=True) # reverse order
```

Slices

```
a = ['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f']
print a[3:5] # ['d', 'e'], 4th up to 5th item (not inclusive)
print a[-1] # f, i.e., last item
print a[:3] # ['a', 'b', 'c'], first 3 items
print a[2:] # ['c', 'd', 'e', 'f'], all items from 3rd to end
print a[:] # whole list
```

Containers – Dictionaries

Dictionaries

A group of items that are accessed by a value.

Arrays are accessed by index - the order is important. To access a given item, you have to know where it is or search for it.

A lot of data isn't inherently ordered. Takes ages of people in a family. You don't think "Bart was the third one born, so must be 10." You mentally map the name to the age.

```
ages[key] = value
```

dictionary name

can be almost any type - numbers, strings, objects (but not lists)

can be any type

Dictionaries are not ordered. You can iterate over them, but the items can be returned in any order (and it won't even be the same twice).

(Compare this idea to the everything box...)

Note: Called hashes or associative arrays in Perl, available as std::map in C++.

```
a = [100, 365, 1600, 24]

a[0] # first item
a[3] # 4th item

ages = dict()
ages['Lisa'] = 8
ages['Bart'] = 10
ages['Homer'] = 38

len(ages) # no if items in dictionary

ages.keys()   # array of all keys
ages.values() # all values
del ages['Lisa'] # removes item
ages.has_key('Marge') # returns False
ages.clear() # removes all values

ages = {'Lisa':8, 'Bart':10, 'Homer':38}
```

shorthand method of creating a dictionary

Control Structures

for Loops

In C, we delineate blocks of code with braces – whitespace is unimportant (but good style).

```
void my_c_function {
    // function code here
}
```

In Python, the whitespace is the *only* way to delineate blocks (because it's good style).

```
for simpson in ages.keys():
    print simpson + " is " + ages[simpson] + "years old."

a = 12 # this is outside of the loop
```

You can use tabs *or* spaces to create the indentation, but you cannot mix the two. Decide which way you want to do it and stick to it. People debate which to use (and if you can be swayed, I *highly* recommend tabs).

Example:
Given an array a of 10 values, print each value on a line.

C/C++

```
# given an array of 10 values
for (int i=0;i<10-1;i++) {
    value = a[i]
    printf ("%d", value)
}
```

Python

```
for value in a:
    print value
```

Can be anything in the list, and can create them on the fly:

```
for string in ['E','A','D','G','B','e']:
    # do something
```

Control Structures

If you *do* need an index in the loop:

```
a = ['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e']
for index, item in enumerate(a):
    print index, item

# Output
# 0 a
# 1 b
# 2 c
# 3 d
# 4 e
```

if statement

```
if expression:
    statement 1
    statement 2
elif expression:
    pass
elif expression:
    ...
else
    statement 1
    statement n
```

expressions are
boolean statements

```
if True:
    # debug statements
```

useful for debugging; set
to False when done

while loop

```
# How many times is this
# number divisible by 2?
value = 82688
count = 0
while not (value % 2):
    count = count + 1
    value = value  / 2
    print value
print count
```

Printing Variables

format method on strings

```
a = 12.2
b = 5
c = [a,b,42]
dict = {"tiger":"Hobbes", "boy":"Calvin", "philosopher":"Bacon"}

print "The value of a is: {0}".format(a)
print "The value of a is {0} and the value of b is {1}".format(a,b)
print "First and second elements of array: {0[0]}, {0[1]}".format(c)
print "A {0[boy]} and his {0[tiger]}.".format(dict)
print "Formatted to two decimal places: {0:.2f}, {1:.2f}".format(a, b)
print "Pad value to 10 characters: {0:10}".format(a)
print "Cast value to string: {0!s}".format(a) # same as ...format(str(a))
```

first item in list

second item

this is a tuple

This is standard `printf` style formatting - google "printf format" for examples

deprecated older '%' style, shown since you'll come across it

```
a = 12.4 # type is float (f)
b = 5 # type is integer (d = decimal)

print "The value of a is: %f" % a
print "The value of a is %f and the value of b is %d" % (a,b)

Format float output:
print "The value of a is: %.3f" % a # three decimal places
```

Note the need for parentheses with more than one value.

Files

Open a File

```
filename = "rc3_catalog.txt"
f = open(filename)
rc3_catalog_file = open(filename)
```

bad style - be descriptive in your variable names!

The actual filename is an input to your program. Try to abstract your inputs and place them at the top of the file.

Code defensively – what if the file isn't there? You'll be surprised how much time this will save you.

```
try:
    rc3_catalog_file = open(filename)
except IOError:
    print "Error: file '%s' could not be opened." % filename
    sys.exit(1)
```

- Minimize how much you put in the `try:` block.
- Determine what the error is by making the code fail in a simple program.

Files

Read over all of the lines in the file:

```
for line in rc3_catalog_file:
    if line[0] == "#":
        continue
    line.rstrip("\n")
    values = line.split()
```

skip lines that begin with a '#'

strip the newline character from each line (split also removes \n)

separate the values by whitespace and return as an array

Write to another file:

```
output_file = open("output_file", 'w')
output_file.write(a, b)
```

try/except

```
import sys

a = 1
b = 0

print a / b

# Result:
# ZeroDivisionError: integer division or modulo by zero

try:
    c = a / b
except ZeroDivisionError:
    print "Hey, you can't divide by zero!"
    sys.exit(1) # exit with a value of 0 for no error, 1 for error
```

You don't have to exit from an error – use this construct to recover from errors and continue.

```
try:
    c = a / b
except ZeroDivisionError:
    c = 0

# continues
```

```
# check if a dictionary has
# a given key defined
try:
    d["host"]
except KeyError:
    # undefined, set default value
    d["host"] = localhost

# Although this command does the same thing!
d.get("host", "localhost")
```

try/except

called only when `try` succeeds

provides the opportunity to clean up anything previously set up – always called

```
>>> def divide(x, y):
...     try:
...         result = x / y
...     except ZeroDivisionError:
...         print "division by zero!"
...     else:
...         print "result is", result
...     finally:
...         print "executing finally clause"
...
>>> divide(2, 1)
result is 2
executing finally clause
>>> divide(2, 0)
division by zero!
executing finally clause
>>> divide("2", "1")
executing finally clause
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in ?
  File "<stdin>", line 3, in divide
TypeError: unsupported operand type(s) for /: 'str' and 'str'
```

(From the Python documentation.)

Casting

Where appropriate, you can covert between types:

```
a = "1234" # this is a string
b = int(a) # convert to an integer

# but to be safer...

try:
    b = int(a)
except ValueError:
    b = None
```

Other examples:

```
a = '12.3e4'

print float(a) # 123000.0

print complex(a) # (123000+0j)

#print int(a) # ValueError

print int(float(a)) # 123000

print bool(a) # True

print str(complex(a)) # (123000+0j)
```

Code Defensively – asserts

As your program runs, you make certain assumptions about your code. For example, we have an array that some process fills, and we assume it won't be empty.

```
my_values = list()
# some code to populate my_values

assert len(my_values) > 1, "my_values was empty!"
for i in my_values:
    # do stuff
```

If my_values is empty, this loop is skipped silently.

If this fails, then the exception AssertionError is thrown and this message is printed out.

Be liberal with `assert` statements - they cost nothing. When your script is ready for production use, you can turn them off in two ways:

header in file

```
#/usr/bin/python -O
```

command line

```
% python -O myScript.py
```

Can perform more than one check:

```
assert a > 10 and b < 20, "Values out of range."
```

List Comprehension

Take the numbers 1-10 and create an array that contains the square of those values.

One of the nicest features of Python!

List comprehension generates a new array.

```
a = range(1,10+1)

a2 = list()
for x in a:
    a2.append(x**2)

a2 = [x**2 for x in a]
```

} Using a for loop

Using list comprehension

Can also filter at the same time:

```
a = range(1,50+1)
# even numbers only
b = [x for x in a if x % 2 == 0]
```

Convert data types:

```
# read from a file
a = ['234', '345', '42', '73', '71']
a = [int(x) for x in a]
```

Call a function for each item in a list:

```
[myFunc(x) for x in a]
```

← can ignore return value

Functions / Methods

document function with triple quotes

```
def myFormula(a, b, c, d):
    ''' formula:  (2a + b) / (c - d) '''
    return (2*a + b) / (c - d)
```

indent as with loops

can set default values on some, all, or no parameters

```
def myFormula(a=1, b=2, c=3, d=4):
    ''' formula:  (2a + b) / (c - d) '''
    return (2*a + b) / (c - d)

print myFormula(b=12, d=4, c=5)
```

Note order doesn't matter when using the names (preferred method).

If a default value is set, you don't have to call it at all.

Useful math tools:

```
import math

# constants
a = math.pi
b = math.e

c = float("+inf")
d = float("-inf")
e = float("inf")
f = float("nan") # not a number

def myFormula(a, b, c, d):
    ''' formula:  (2a + b) / (c - d) '''
    num = 2 * a + b
    den = c - d
    try:
        return num/den
    except ZeroDivisionError:
        return float('inf')

# tests
math.isnan(a)
math.isinf(a)
```

Functions / Methods

Passing parameters into function / methods.

Unlike C/C++, the parameter list is dynamic, i.e. you don't have to know what it will be when you write the code.

You can also require that all parameters be specified by keywords (kwargs).

Accepts any number of arguments (of any type!)

```
def myFunction(*args):
    for index, arg in enumerate(args):
        print "This is argument %d: %s" % (index+1, str(args[index]))

myFunction('a', None, True)

# Output:
# This is argument 1: a
# This is argument 2: None
# This is argument 3: True
```

Note two '**' here vs. one above.

```
def myFunction2(**kwargs):
    for key in kwargs.keys():
        print "Value for key '%s': %s" % (key, kwargs[key])

myFunction2(name='Zaphod', heads=2, arms=3, president=True)

# Output:
# Value for key 'president': True
# Value for key 'heads': 2
# Value for key 'name': Zaphod
# Value for key 'arms': 3
```

kwargs = keyword arguments

Note the output order is not the same (since it's a dictionary).

Can be mixed:

```
def myFunction3(*args, **kwargs):
    print "ok"

myFunction3()
myFunction3(1, 2, name="Zaphod")
myFunction3(name="Zaphod")
myFunction3(name ="Zaphod", 1, True)
```

zero args are ok

Invalid - named arguments must follow non-named arguments (as defined).

Odds and Ends

Range

```
range(10)       # [0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]
range(10,20)    # [10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19]
range(10,20,2) # [10, 12, 14, 16, 18]
```

useful in loops

(start, stop, step) - step can only be an integer

```
[x * 0.1 for x in range(0, 10)]
```

generating ranges in non-integer steps

Objects and Copies

Does not make a copy – these are the same objects!

Copies all of the items into a new object.

```
ages = {'Lisa':8, 'Bart':10, 'Homer':38}
simpsons = ages
ages['Bart'] = 9
print simpsons['Bart'] # output: 9

ages = {'Lisa':8, 'Bart':10, 'Homer':38}
simpsons = ages.copy()
ages['Bart'] = 9
print simpsons['Bart'] # output: 10
```

Odds and Ends

The *in* operator:

```
a = ['a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f']
print 'a' in a # True
print 'x' not in a # True
```

Create Strings from Lists with a Delimiter

```
strings = ['E','A','D','G','B','e']
print "|".join(strings)
# Output: E|A|D|G|B|e
```

Operator Overloading

We know '+' adds two numbers, but it also "adds" two strings together. We can define that operator to mean custom things to our own objects.

(This is a powerful feature!)

```
class Circle(Shape):

    radius = 0.0

    def __init__(self, r=0.0):
        self.radius = r

    def area(self):
        return math.pi * self.radius * self.radius

    def __add__(self, other):
        c = Circle()
        c.radius = self.radius + other.radius
        return c

c1 = Circle(r=5)
c2 = Circle(r=10)
c3 = c1 + c2

print c3.radius # Result: 15
```

radius is optional

added a new init method that takes a radius

override + operator

now we can add two Circle objects together to create a new Circle

Further Reading

This is a great reference for Python. Keep this bookmark handy.

http://rgruet.free.fr/PQR27/PQR2.7.html

Several people have emailed me this – it's also a good introduction.

http://openbookproject.net//thinkCSpy/

This web page has over one hundred "hidden" or less commonly known features or tricks. It's worth reviewing this page at some point. Many will be beyond what you need and be CS esoteric, but lots are useful. StackOverflow is also a great web site for specific programming questions.

http://stackoverflow.com/questions/101268/hidden-features-of-python

And, of course, the official Python documentation:

http://docs.python.org

Finally, if you are not familiar with how computers store numbers, this is mandatory reading:

http://docs.python.org/tutorial/floatingpoint.html