Python Iterators

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Python Iterators

An iterator is an object that contains a countable number of values.

An iterator is an object that can be iterated upon, meaning that you can traverse through all the values.

Technically, in Python, an iterator is an object which implements the iterator protocol, which consist of the methods `__iter__()` and `__next__()`.

Iterator vs Iterable

Lists, tuples, dictionaries, and sets are all iterable objects. They are iterable *containers* which you can get an iterator from.

All these objects have a `iter()` method which is used to get an iterator:

Example

Return an iterator from a tuple, and print each value:

```
mytuple = ("apple", "banana", "cherry")
myit = iter(mytuple)

print(next(myit))
print(next(myit))
print(next(myit))
```

Strings are also iterable objects, containing a sequence of characters:

```
mystr = "banana"
myit = iter(mystr)

print(next(myit))
print(next(myit))
print(next(myit))
print(next(myit))
print(next(myit))
print(next(myit))
```

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Looping Through an Iterator

We can also use a `for` loop to iterate through an iterable object:

Example

Iterate the values of a tuple:

```
mytuple = ("apple", "banana", "cherry")

for x in mytuple:
  print(x)
```

Try it Yourself »

Example

Iterate the characters of a string:

```
print(x)
```

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The `for` loop actually creates an iterator object and executes the `next()` method for each loop.

Create an Iterator

To create an object/class as an iterator you have to implement the methods `__iter__()` and `__next__()` to your object.

As you have learned in the Python Classes/Objects chapter, all classes have a function called `__init__()`, which allows you to do some initializing when the object is being created.

The `__iter__()` method acts similar, you can do operations (initializing etc.), but must always return the iterator object itself.

The `__next__()` method also allows you to do operations, and must return the next item in the sequence.

Example

Create an iterator that returns numbers, starting with 1, and each sequence will increase by one (returning 1,2,3,4,5 etc.):

```
class MyNumbers:
  def __iter__(self):
    self.a = 1
    return self

  def __next__(self):
    x = self.a
    self.a += 1
    return x
```

```
print(next(myiter))
print(next(myiter))
print(next(myiter))
print(next(myiter))
print(next(myiter))
```

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StopIteration

The example above would continue forever if you had enough next() statements, or if it was used in a `for` loop.

To prevent the iteration from going on forever, we can use the `StopIteration` statement.

In the `__next__()` method, we can add a terminating condition to raise an error if the iteration is done a specified number of times:

Example

Stop after 20 iterations:

```
class MyNumbers:
  def __iter__(self):
    self.a = 1
    return self

  def __next__(self):
    if self.a <= 20:
      x = self.a
      self.a += 1
      return x
    else:
      raise StopIteration

myclass = MyNumbers()
```