

Lecture I - Introduction

Programming with Python

Dr. Tobias Vlček

Kühne Logistics University Hamburg - Fall 2025

About this Course

About me

- Field: Optimizing and simulating complex systems
- Languages: of choice: Julia, Python and Rust
- Interest: Modelling, Simulations, Machine Learning
- Teaching: OR, Algorithms, and Programming
- Contact: vlcek@beyondsimulations.com

...

Tip

I really appreciate active participation and interaction!

Course Outline

- Part I: Introduction to Programming with Python
- Part II: Data Science Tools with Python
- Part III: Programming Projects

Participation

- Prerequisite for course Management Science (taught by me)
- Try actively participating in this course
- You will find it much (!) easier to follow later
- Materials will be provided in the KLU portal
- Slides are hosted at beyondsimulations.github.io/Introduction-to-Python

Teaching

- Lecture: Presentation of tools and concepts, based on small examples and code snippets
- Tutorial: Hands-on examples to be solved in groups
- Difficulty: Difficult at first, but gradually easier

Passing the Course

- Pass/fail course
- 75% attendance required for passing the course

- 2 assignments and 1 little project
- You will be given programming exercises to solve
- You can group up (3 students) and work together
- Each student group submits one solution

Solution

- Provide a code solution to the problem (.py files)
- Code files need to be executable
- Detailed explanations of your code should be provided
- Use comments or docstrings in your code
- Provide a general (verbal) introduction to each problem

...

Tip

I'd encourage you to start and submit your solution early

Difficulty of the Course

- We'll cover the basics of programming (in Python) at first
- This is similar to learning a new foreign language
- First, you have to get used to the language and learn words
- Later, you'll be able to apply it and see results
- Similar to learning a language: Practice, practice, practice!

What to expect

- Some investment in the beginning to see the return later
- You can ask questions and get support anytime
- After completion, you will be able to read code
- and write your own program using Python
- That's quite something!

Goals of the Course

- Essential concepts and tools of modern programming
- Automated solutions for recurrent tasks
- Algorithm-based solutions of complex problems
- Usage of AI in a specific context

Python as Language

- Origins: Conceived in late 1980s as a teaching and scripting language
- Simple Syntax: Python's syntax is straightforward and easy to learn
- Versatility: Used in web development, data analysis, artificial intelligence, and more
- Community Support: A large community of users and extensive documentation

Artificial Intelligence

How to use AI

- We base our assessment on the KLU classification:
 - Level 1: Pause: Use of AI defined by the educator
- You are allowed to use AI (Claude, ChatGPT, Mistral ...)
- Use them to support understanding
- A course chatbot is available on the learning website
- It is designed to guide your problem-solving process

...

Warning

But you should not simply use them to replace your learning.

How to use the Chatbot

- Just click the chatbot bubble on the website
- The chat will open and you can ask your questions
- It is programmed by us and uses Mistral AI as backend
- Ask your question as specific as possible
- This ensures enough context for the model
- We can see aggregated logs, but cannot identify you
- Please don't provide personal information

Why learn programming?

Analytics

Photo by Choong Deng Xiang on Unsplash

Research

Photo by National Cancer Institute on Unsplash

Visualization

Photo by Clay Banks on Unsplash

Finance

Photo by Ishant Mishra on Unsplash

Logistics

Photo by Denys Nevozhai on Unsplash

How to learn programming

My Recommendation

1. Be present: Attend the lecture and participate

2. Put in some work: Repeat lecture notes and try to understand the examples yourself
3. Do coding: Run code examples on your own, play around, google, modify, and solve problems on your own

...

💡 Tip

Great resources to start are books and small challenges. You can find a list of book recommendations at the end of the lecture. Small challenges to solve can for example be found on [Codewars](#).

Don't give up!

- Programming is problem solving, don't get frustrated!
- Expect to stretch your comfort zone

Learning Path

- The learning path can be quite steep!
- First of all help each other!
- Try to find help in lecture materials and books, the Python documentation, and online (e.g. Google, ChatGPT, StackOverflow, ...)
- In case you get frustrated, read the following [helpful blog post about the challenges on medium.com](#)
- In case you find errors or typos, please report them [via e-mail](#) to me

Setting up Python

Installing an IDE

- In this course, we will use Zed as our IDE
- Download and install it from <https://zed.dev/>
- It is available for Windows, Mac and Linux
- It is free to use, lightweight and fast
- Has AI support built-in, which we will use later

What is an IDE?

- Integrated Development Environment = application
- It allows you to write, run and debug code scripts
- Other IDEs include for example:
 - [PyCharm](#) from JetBrains
 - [Visual Studio Code](#) from Microsoft

Installing Python with uv

- We will use [uv](#) to install and manage Python versions
- It works on Windows, Mac and Linux
- It helps us to manage packages and virtual environments

- Now, we all [go here](#) and install `uv` and Python

Python on iPads

- Although you can run Python scripts from on your iPad, it is not recommended for the course
- Nonetheless, you could use [Pythonista](#)
- It works locally on your iPad and can run most scripts

...

Caution

Not all packages available in Python are available in Pythonista, thus you might need a computer to solve certain problems.

Your first code

Hello, my name is ...!

Task: Open the directory you created for the course and create a new file called `hello.py` with the following code:

```
# This is a comment in Python
print("Hello, my name is [YOUR NAME HERE]!")
```

```
Hello, my name is [YOUR NAME HERE]!
```

...

Run it by executing the following command in your terminal:

```
uv run python hello.py
```

...

Hello, World in a Message

Task: Create a new file called `message_world.py` file. Assign the string `"Hello, World!"` to a variable called `message` and print the variable.

...

- Use the equals sign (=)
- Variable name goes on the left
- Value to be assigned goes on the right

...

```
# Here we assign the string "Hello, World!" to variable message and print it
message = "Hello, World!"
print(message)
```

```
Hello, World!
```

Hello, World in Parentheses

We can also mix " and ' in a string, if we are consistent:

```
# This code works
message = 'I shout "Hello, World!'"
print(message)
```

```
I shout "Hello, World!"
```

...

```
# This code does not!
message = 'I shout 'Hello, World!'"
print(message)
```

...

Try it yourself! What does happen, if you try to run it?

First Errors

SyntaxError: invalid syntax

- The code is not valid Python syntax
- Likely the most common error that you will encounter!
- Happens when you make a mistake, e.g., illegal character, missing a colon, parentheses or quotations
- You can fix this by correcting the code and re-running
- In the lecture you will encounter many more errors!

Program

What is a Program?

- Sequence of instructions telling a computer what to do
- Written in a language the computer can understand
- Basic operations in most languages:
 - Input: Data from keyboard, file, network, sensors, etc.
 - Output: Display data, save it, send over network, etc.

- Processing: Perform calculations, analyze data, make decisions, find patterns, etc.

Key concepts

- Key concepts in most languages:
 - Variables: Store and manipulate data
 - Conditional execution: Check and execute accordingly
 - Loops: Perform actions repeatedly
 - Functions: Group instructions for reusability

...

Note

We will cover these concepts in more detail later in the course.

How Python executes code

- Python is an interpreted language
- The source code is executed line by line
- The interpreter checks the syntax and executes the code
- This is in contrast to compiled languages, where the code is compiled into machine code before execution

Hello again, World!

Let's go back to our first program:

```
# Our first program
message = "Hello, World!"
print(message)
```

...

- Comment: In the first line we define a comment with `#`
- Variable: In the second we define a variable `message`
- Function: In the third line we call a function `print`

Don't worry!

- Already confused? Don't worry about it for now!
- We'll learn more about variables and functions later

Python's Syntax

The Zen of Python

- Python's name originally comes from Monty Python
- Style is based on a philosophy called Zen of Python
- Collection of 19 statements with general principles

...

Task: Try this code in Python:

```
# Try this code in Python to see the Zen of Python
import this
```

Variables

- A variable in Python is a name that points to a value
- Created by using the assignment operator `=`
- Python does not require a declaration of variable types

```
a = 2 # Variable a assigned the value 2
b = "Time" # Variable b assigned the value "Time"
c = print # Variable c assigned the print function
c(b) # Now we can call the print function with c
```

Time

...

But there are certain rules to variable names!

Variable Naming Conventions

- Must start with a letter or underscore `_`
- Can contain letters, numbers and underscores
- Names are case sensitive, e.g., `a` and `A` are different!
- Cannot be a reserved word, e.g., `for`, `if`, `def`, etc
- Good names are short and meaningful for humans!

...

Question: Which of the following fulfill these conditions?

`a`, `_duration`, `1x`, `time_left`, `1_minute`, `oneWorld`, `xy4792`

Functions

- Functions are named blocks of code
- Can take arguments `function([arguments])`
- Can return results or `None`

...

```
# Print is such a function
print("Hello, World!") # It takes an argument and prints it to the console
print("Hello", "World!", sep=", ") # It can also take multiple arguments
```



```
Hello, World!  
Hello, World!
```

...

Note

We will cover functions in more detail later in the course.

Values and Types

What are Values and Types?

- Value: Fundamental thing that a program manipulates
 - In Python, values are either numbers or strings
- Type: Type of a value
 - Determines what operations can be performed on it
 - `type()` is a function that returns the type of a value
 - Takes one argument and returns its type as string

Strings

Back to our example of “Hello, World!”

```
# We define the variable message and assign it the value "Hello, World!"  
message = "Hello, World!"  
  
# We save its type in another variable called message_type  
message_type = type(message)  
  
# We print the value of our new variable  
print(f"{message} is a {message_type}")
```

```
Hello, World! is a <class 'str'>
```

...

Result: “Hello, World” is a string - in short ‘str’.

...

But what about the f”?

Formatted Strings

- f-strings are strings that start with `f`
- They contain expressions, e.g., variables, in braces
- Evaluated at run time and inserted into the string

...

Note

In older code bases, f strings were not available. Here, interpolation could be done as shown below with `print()` and `.format()`. But this method is less concise and arguably less readable.

...

```
print("{} is a {}".format(message, message_type))
```

```
Hello, World! is a <class 'str'>
```

Specifying Formatted Strings

- We can further specify their format with `{<to_print>:<width>.<precision>f}`
- `width` can be a number specifying the output width
- `<`, `^`, `>` can be used before the width to align the text
- `precision` can be used to specify the decimals
- `.f` can be used to format floats

```
x = "hello"
print(f"{x:<10} has {len(x):>10.2f} characters.")
```

```
hello      has      5.00 characters.
```

Expressions

- Produce a value when evaluated
- Can be used as part of larger expressions or statements
- Statements are expressions that don't produce a value
- Examples: arithmetic operations, function calls, variables

```
x = 1 # Statement that assigns the value 3 to x
y = x + 2 # Expression on the right side assigned to a variable y
print(f"Great, the result is {y}")
```

```
Great, the result is 3
```

A step back: What is a String?

- Remember: "Hello, World" is a string - in short 'str'
- A string is a sequence of characters enclosed in quotes
- Examples: "Hello", 'World', "123", '1World23'

```
hello = "Hello"
world = 'World!'
```

```
print(hello,world,sep=", ") # We can specify the separator with the
argument sep
```

```
Hello, World!
```

...

Note

Strings are immutable, we can't change characters in them once created.

String Operations

- But we can also do much more with strings!
- String concatenation, indexing, slicing, length, etc.

```
two_strings = "Hello" + ", " + "World!" # String concatenation
print(two_strings)
```

```
Hello, World!
```

...

```
print(two_strings[0]) # Indexing starts at zero!
```

```
H
```

...

```
print(len(two_strings)) # With len we can find the length of our string
```

```
13
```

...

```
print("--x--"*3) # We can also repeat strings
```

```
--x----x----x--
```

Booleans

- Booleans represent two values: `True` and `False`
- Internally they are represented as `1` and `0`, respectively
- They are used for logical operations and control flow
- E.g.: `if`, `while`, `for`, `elif`, `else`

...

```
x = True
y = False
print(x)
print(type(y))
```

```
True
<class 'bool'>
```

...

> More on them in our next lecture!

Integers and Floats

- Integers are whole numbers, e.g.: 1, -3, 0 or 100
- Floats are decimal numbers, e.g.: -4.78, 0.1 or 1.23e2
- Bit size is not specified (e.g.: 64 bits) in Python!

...

```
x = 1; y = 1.2864e2 # We can separate multiple operations in one line with
semicolons
print(f"{x} is of type {type(x)}, {y} is of type {type(y)}")
```

```
1 is of type <class 'int'>, 128.64 is of type <class 'float'>
```

...

Warning

The interpreter will automatically convert booleans to integers to floats when necessary, but not the other way around!

First Functions and Operators

Arithmetic operators

```
addition = 1 + 2;          print(f"Result: addition is {addition}")
subtraction = 1 - 2;       print(f"Result: subtraction is
{subtraction}")
multiplication = 3 * 4;    print(f"Result: multiplication is
{multiplication}")
division = 7 / 4;          print(f"Result: division is {division}")
floor_division = 7 // 4;   print(f"Result: floor_division is
{floor_division}")
exponentiation = 9 ** 0.5; print(f"Result: exponentiation is
```

```
{exponentiation}")
modulo = 10 % 3;           print(f"Result: modulo is {modulo}")
```

```
Result: addition is 3
Result: subtraction is -1
Result: multiplication is 12
Result: division is 1.75
Result: floor_division is 1
Result: exponentiation is 3.0
Result: modulo is 1
```

Precedence

- Operators are the same as in most other languages
- Can be combined with each other and variables
- Normal rules of precedence apply

...

```
# Operator precedence works as on paper
combined_operation = 2 + 3 * 4
print(f"2 + 3 * 4 = {combined_operation}")
```

```
2 + 3 * 4 = 14
```

...

```
# Parentheses change precedence as expected
parentheses_operation = (2 + 3) * 4
print(f"(2 + 3) * 4 = {parentheses_operation}")
```

```
(2 + 3) * 4 = 20
```

The input() Function

- Used to get user input as string from the console
- Syntax: `input([userprompt])`
- Displays optional prompt and waits for user input

...

```
name = input("What's your name? ")
print(f"Hello, {name}!")
```

...

! Important

The function always returns the input as string!

Input in Action

Task: Solve the following task:

```
# TODO: Ask the user for their age and print a compliment
```

...

Solution

```
age = int(input("How old are you? "))  
print(f"You look great for {age}!")
```

Type Conversion

Use type conversion for other data types

1. Integer: `int(input())`
2. Float: `float(input())`
3. Boolean: `bool(input())`
4. String: `str(input())`

...

```
# Converting to Integer  
age = int(input("Enter your age: "))  
next_year = age + 1  
print(f"Next year, you'll be {next_year}")
```

The round() Function

```
# Hence, we can use the int() function to convert a float into an int  
soon_int = 1.789  
print(f"{soon_int} converted to {int(soon_int)} of type  
{type(int(soon_int))}")
```

```
1.789 converted to 1 of type <class 'int'>
```

...

```
# We can also use `round()` to round a float to an int  
soon_int = 1.789  
print(f"{soon_int} converted to {round(soon_int)} of type  
{type(round(soon_int))}")
```

```
1.789 converted to 2 of type <class 'int'>
```

...

```
# Or to a float with a certain number of decimals
no_int = 1.789
print(f"{no_int} converted to {round(no_int,1)} of type {type(round(no_int,1))}")
```

```
1.789 converted to 1.8 of type <class 'float'>
```

Questions?

...

Note

That's it for today's lecture!
We now have covered the basics on the Python syntax, variables, and data types.

Literature

Interesting Books to start

- Downey, A. B. (2024). Think Python: How to think like a computer scientist (Third edition). O'Reilly. [Link to free online version](#)
- Elter, S. (2021). Schrödinger programmiert Python: Das etwas andere Fachbuch (1. Auflage). Rheinwerk Verlag.

...

Note

Think Python is a great book to start with. It's available online for free [here](#). Schrödinger Programmiert Python is a great alternative for German students, as it is a very playful introduction to programming with lots of examples.

...

For more interesting literature to learn more about Python, take a look at the [literature list](#) of this course.