Visualizing Function Calls

We can explore how Python manages function calls using the Python Visualizer. (See the Resources page.)

In the example below, function `convert_to_seconds` contains a call on `convert_to_minutes`.

```
def convert_to_minutes(num_hours):
    """(int) -> int
    Return the number of minutes there are in num_hours hours.
    >>> convert_to_minutes(2)
    120
    """
    result = num_hours * 60
    return result

def convert_to_seconds(num_hours):
    """(int) -> int
    Return the number of seconds there are in num_hours hours.
    >>> convert_to_seconds(2)
    7200
    """
    return convert_to_minutes(num_hours) * 60

seconds_2 = convert_to_seconds(4)
```

Here is what the memory model looks like just before the return statement inside function `convert_to_minutes` looks like:

Note that there are three stack frames on the call stack: the main one, then underneath that a frame for the call on function `convert_to_seconds`, and underneath that the frame for the call on function `convert_to_minutes`.

Here is a link to the Python Visualizer at this stage of the execution so that you can explore this yourself. **We strongly encourage you to step backward and forward through this program until you understand every step of execution.**

When the return statement is executed, the call on `convert_to_minutes` exits. The bottom stack frame is removed, and execution resumes using the stack frame for `convert_to_seconds`:
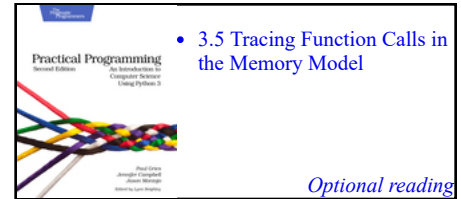
```
 1  def convert_to_minutes(num_hours):
 2      '''(int) -> int
 3      Return the number of minutes there are in num
 4      >>> convert_to_minutes(2)
 5      120
 6      '''
 7      result = num_hours * 60
 8      return result
 9
10  def convert_to_seconds(num_hours):
11      '''(int) -> int
12      Return the number of seconds there are in num
13      >>> convert_to_minutes(2)
14      7200
15      '''
16      return convert_to_minutes(num_hours) * 60
17
18  seconds_2 = convert_to_seconds(4)
```

Frames   Objects

Global variables   id1:function
                          convert_to_minutes(num_hours)
convert_to_minutes   id1
convert_to_seconds   id2   id2:function
                           convert_to_seconds(num_hours)

convert_to_seconds   id3:int
       num_hours   id3   4
          Return
           value   id5   id5:int
                           14400

Edit code

<< First   < Back   Step 8 of 8   Forward >   Last >>

→ line that has just executed
➡ next line to execute

Jennifer Campbell • Paul Gries
University of Toronto