

DATA STRUCTURES

This chapter describes some things you’ve learned about already in more detail, and adds some new things as well.

5.1 More on Lists

The list data type has some more methods. Here are all of the methods of list objects:

list.append(*x*)

Add an item to the end of the list. Equivalent to `a[len(a):] = [x]`.

list.extend(*iterable*)

Extend the list by appending all the items from the iterable. Equivalent to `a[len(a):] = iterable`.

list.insert(*i*, *x*)

Insert an item at a given position. The first argument is the index of the element before which to insert, so `a.insert(0, x)` inserts at the front of the list, and `a.insert(len(a), x)` is equivalent to `a.append(x)`.

list.remove(*x*)

Remove the first item from the list whose value is equal to *x*. It raises a `ValueError` if there is no such item.

list.pop(*[i]*)

Remove the item at the given position in the list, and return it. If no index is specified, `a.pop()` removes and returns the last item in the list. (The square brackets around the *i* in the method signature denote that the parameter is optional, not that you should type square brackets at that position. You will see this notation frequently in the Python Library Reference.)

list.clear()

Remove all items from the list. Equivalent to `del a[:]`.

list.index(*x*, *start*, *end*)

Return zero-based index in the list of the first item whose value is equal to *x*. Raises a `ValueError` if there is no such item.

The optional arguments *start* and *end* are interpreted as in the slice notation and are used to limit the search to a particular subsequence of the list. The returned index is computed relative to the beginning of the full sequence rather than the *start* argument.

list.count(*x*)

Return the number of times *x* appears in the list.

list.sort(*key=None*, *reverse=False*)

Sort the items of the list in place (the arguments can be used for sort customization, see `sorted()` for their explanation).

`list.reverse()`

Reverse the elements of the list in place.

`list.copy()`

Return a shallow copy of the list. Equivalent to `a[:]`.

An example that uses most of the list methods:

```
>>> fruits = ['orange', 'apple', 'pear', 'banana', 'kiwi', 'apple', 'banana']
>>> fruits.count('apple')
2
>>> fruits.count('tangerine')
0
>>> fruits.index('banana')
3
>>> fruits.index('banana', 4) # Find next banana starting a position 4
6
>>> fruits.reverse()
>>> fruits
['banana', 'apple', 'kiwi', 'banana', 'pear', 'apple', 'orange']
>>> fruits.append('grape')
>>> fruits
['banana', 'apple', 'kiwi', 'banana', 'pear', 'apple', 'orange', 'grape']
>>> fruits.sort()
>>> fruits
['apple', 'apple', 'banana', 'banana', 'grape', 'kiwi', 'orange', 'pear']
>>> fruits.pop()
'pear'
```

You might have noticed that methods like `insert`, `remove` or `sort` that only modify the list have no return value printed – they return the default `None`.¹ This is a design principle for all mutable data structures in Python.

5.1.1 Using Lists as Stacks

The list methods make it very easy to use a list as a stack, where the last element added is the first element retrieved (“last-in, first-out”). To add an item to the top of the stack, use `append()`. To retrieve an item from the top of the stack, use `pop()` without an explicit index. For example:

```
>>> stack = [3, 4, 5]
>>> stack.append(6)
>>> stack.append(7)
>>> stack
[3, 4, 5, 6, 7]
>>> stack.pop()
7
>>> stack
[3, 4, 5, 6]
>>> stack.pop()
6
>>> stack.pop()
5
>>> stack
[3, 4]
```

¹ Other languages may return the mutated object, which allows method chaining, such as `d->insert("a")->remove("b")->sort();`.

5.1.2 Using Lists as Queues

It is also possible to use a list as a queue, where the first element added is the first element retrieved (“first-in, first-out”); however, lists are not efficient for this purpose. While appends and pops from the end of list are fast, doing inserts or pops from the beginning of a list is slow (because all of the other elements have to be shifted by one).

To implement a queue, use `collections.deque` which was designed to have fast appends and pops from both ends. For example:

```
>>> from collections import deque
>>> queue = deque(["Eric", "John", "Michael"])
>>> queue.append("Terry")           # Terry arrives
>>> queue.append("Graham")         # Graham arrives
>>> queue.popleft()                 # The first to arrive now leaves
'Eric'
>>> queue.popleft()                 # The second to arrive now leaves
'John'
>>> queue                           # Remaining queue in order of arrival
deque(['Michael', 'Terry', 'Graham'])
```

5.1.3 List Comprehensions

List comprehensions provide a concise way to create lists. Common applications are to make new lists where each element is the result of some operations applied to each member of another sequence or iterable, or to create a subsequence of those elements that satisfy a certain condition.

For example, assume we want to create a list of squares, like:

```
>>> squares = []
>>> for x in range(10):
...     squares.append(x**2)
...
>>> squares
[0, 1, 4, 9, 16, 25, 36, 49, 64, 81]
```

Note that this creates (or overwrites) a variable named `x` that still exists after the loop completes. We can calculate the list of squares without any side effects using:

```
squares = list(map(lambda x: x**2, range(10)))
```

or, equivalently:

```
squares = [x**2 for x in range(10)]
```

which is more concise and readable.

A list comprehension consists of brackets containing an expression followed by a `for` clause, then zero or more `for` or `if` clauses. The result will be a new list resulting from evaluating the expression in the context of the `for` and `if` clauses which follow it. For example, this listcomp combines the elements of two lists if they are not equal:

```
>>> [(x, y) for x in [1,2,3] for y in [3,1,4] if x != y]
[(1, 3), (1, 4), (2, 3), (2, 1), (2, 4), (3, 1), (3, 4)]
```

and it's equivalent to:

```
>>> combs = []
>>> for x in [1,2,3]:
...     for y in [3,1,4]:
...         if x != y:
...             combs.append((x, y))
...
>>> combs
[(1, 3), (1, 4), (2, 3), (2, 1), (2, 4), (3, 1), (3, 4)]
```

Note how the order of the `for` and `if` statements is the same in both these snippets.
If the expression is a tuple (e.g. the `(x, y)` in the previous example), it must be parenthesized.

```
>>> vec = [-4, -2, 0, 2, 4]
>>> # create a new list with the values doubled
>>> [x*2 for x in vec]
[-8, -4, 0, 4, 8]
>>> # filter the list to exclude negative numbers
>>> [x for x in vec if x >= 0]
[0, 2, 4]
>>> # apply a function to all the elements
>>> [abs(x) for x in vec]
[4, 2, 0, 2, 4]
>>> # call a method on each element
>>> freshfruit = [' banana', ' loganberry ', 'passion fruit ']
>>> [weapon.strip() for weapon in freshfruit]
['banana', 'loganberry', 'passion fruit']
>>> # create a list of 2-tuples like (number, square)
>>> [(x, x**2) for x in range(6)]
[(0, 0), (1, 1), (2, 4), (3, 9), (4, 16), (5, 25)]
>>> # the tuple must be parenthesized, otherwise an error is raised
>>> [x, x**2 for x in range(6)]
File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
    [x, x**2 for x in range(6)]
    ^
SyntaxError: invalid syntax
>>> # flatten a list using a listcomp with two 'for'
>>> vec = [[1,2,3], [4,5,6], [7,8,9]]
>>> [num for elem in vec for num in elem]
[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]
```

List comprehensions can contain complex expressions and nested functions:

```
>>> from math import pi
>>> [str(round(pi, i)) for i in range(1, 6)]
['3.1', '3.14', '3.142', '3.1416', '3.14159']
```

5.1.4 Nested List Comprehensions

The initial expression in a list comprehension can be any arbitrary expression, including another list comprehension.

Consider the following example of a 3x4 matrix implemented as a list of 3 lists of length 4:

```
>>> matrix = [
...     [1, 2, 3, 4],
...     [5, 6, 7, 8],
```

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```
...     [9, 10, 11, 12],
... ]
```

The following list comprehension will transpose rows and columns:

```
>>> [[row[i] for row in matrix] for i in range(4)]
[[1, 5, 9], [2, 6, 10], [3, 7, 11], [4, 8, 12]]
```

As we saw in the previous section, the nested listcomp is evaluated in the context of the `for` that follows it, so this example is equivalent to:

```
>>> transposed = []
>>> for i in range(4):
...     transposed.append([row[i] for row in matrix])
...
>>> transposed
[[1, 5, 9], [2, 6, 10], [3, 7, 11], [4, 8, 12]]
```

which, in turn, is the same as:

```
>>> transposed = []
>>> for i in range(4):
...     # the following 3 lines implement the nested listcomp
...     transposed_row = []
...     for row in matrix:
...         transposed_row.append(row[i])
...     transposed.append(transposed_row)
...
>>> transposed
[[1, 5, 9], [2, 6, 10], [3, 7, 11], [4, 8, 12]]
```

In the real world, you should prefer built-in functions to complex flow statements. The `zip()` function would do a great job for this use case:

```
>>> list(zip(*matrix))
[(1, 5, 9), (2, 6, 10), (3, 7, 11), (4, 8, 12)]
```

See *Unpacking Argument Lists* for details on the asterisk in this line.

5.2 The `del` statement

There is a way to remove an item from a list given its index instead of its value: the `del` statement. This differs from the `pop()` method which returns a value. The `del` statement can also be used to remove slices from a list or clear the entire list (which we did earlier by assignment of an empty list to the slice). For example:

```
>>> a = [-1, 1, 66.25, 333, 333, 1234.5]
>>> del a[0]
>>> a
[1, 66.25, 333, 333, 1234.5]
>>> del a[2:4]
>>> a
[1, 66.25, 1234.5]
>>> del a[:]
```

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```
>>> a
[]
```

`del` can also be used to delete entire variables:

```
>>> del a
```

Referencing the name `a` hereafter is an error (at least until another value is assigned to it). We'll find other uses for `del` later.

5.3 Tuples and Sequences

We saw that lists and strings have many common properties, such as indexing and slicing operations. They are two examples of *sequence* data types (see `typeseq`). Since Python is an evolving language, other sequence data types may be added. There is also another standard sequence data type: the *tuple*.

A tuple consists of a number of values separated by commas, for instance:

```
>>> t = 12345, 54321, 'hello!'
>>> t[0]
12345
>>> t
(12345, 54321, 'hello!')
>>> # Tuples may be nested:
... u = t, (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
>>> u
((12345, 54321, 'hello!'), (1, 2, 3, 4, 5))
>>> # Tuples are immutable:
... t[0] = 88888
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<stdin>", line 1, in <module>
TypeError: 'tuple' object does not support item assignment
>>> # but they can contain mutable objects:
... v = ([1, 2, 3], [3, 2, 1])
>>> v
([1, 2, 3], [3, 2, 1])
```

As you see, on output tuples are always enclosed in parentheses, so that nested tuples are interpreted correctly; they may be input with or without surrounding parentheses, although often parentheses are necessary anyway (if the tuple is part of a larger expression). It is not possible to assign to the individual items of a tuple, however it is possible to create tuples which contain mutable objects, such as lists.

Though tuples may seem similar to lists, they are often used in different situations and for different purposes. Tuples are *immutable*, and usually contain a heterogeneous sequence of elements that are accessed via unpacking (see later in this section) or indexing (or even by attribute in the case of `namedtuples`). Lists are *mutable*, and their elements are usually homogeneous and are accessed by iterating over the list.

A special problem is the construction of tuples containing 0 or 1 items: the syntax has some extra quirks to accommodate these. Empty tuples are constructed by an empty pair of parentheses; a tuple with one item is constructed by following a value with a comma (it is not sufficient to enclose a single value in parentheses). Ugly, but effective. For example:

```
>>> empty = ()
>>> singleton = 'hello',    # <-- note trailing comma
>>> len(empty)
```

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```
0
>>> len(singleton)
1
>>> singleton
('hello',)
```

The statement `t = 12345, 54321, 'hello!'` is an example of *tuple packing*: the values 12345, 54321 and 'hello!' are packed together in a tuple. The reverse operation is also possible:

```
>>> x, y, z = t
```

This is called, appropriately enough, *sequence unpacking* and works for any sequence on the right-hand side. Sequence unpacking requires that there are as many variables on the left side of the equals sign as there are elements in the sequence. Note that multiple assignment is really just a combination of tuple packing and sequence unpacking.

5.4 Sets

Python also includes a data type for *sets*. A set is an unordered collection with no duplicate elements. Basic uses include membership testing and eliminating duplicate entries. Set objects also support mathematical operations like union, intersection, difference, and symmetric difference.

Curly braces or the `set()` function can be used to create sets. Note: to create an empty set you have to use `set()`, not `{}`; the latter creates an empty dictionary, a data structure that we discuss in the next section.

Here is a brief demonstration:

```
>>> basket = {'apple', 'orange', 'apple', 'pear', 'orange', 'banana'}
>>> print(basket)           # show that duplicates have been removed
{'orange', 'banana', 'pear', 'apple'}
>>> 'orange' in basket      # fast membership testing
True
>>> 'crabgrass' in basket
False

>>> # Demonstrate set operations on unique letters from two words
...
>>> a = set('abracadabra')
>>> b = set('alacazam')
>>> a                       # unique letters in a
{'a', 'r', 'b', 'c', 'd'}
>>> a - b                   # letters in a but not in b
{'r', 'd', 'b'}
>>> a | b                   # letters in a or b or both
{'a', 'c', 'r', 'd', 'b', 'm', 'z', 'l'}
>>> a & b                   # letters in both a and b
{'a', 'c'}
>>> a ^ b                   # letters in a or b but not both
{'r', 'd', 'b', 'm', 'z', 'l'}
```

Similarly to *list comprehensions*, set comprehensions are also supported:

```
>>> a = {x for x in 'abracadabra' if x not in 'abc'}
>>> a
{'r', 'd'}
```