

Setting Up a Custom Environment on Google Drive for Colab

Introduction

Google Colab instances come with only a minimal set of pre-installed packages. Even in simple projects (such as the ones of the university courses you will be attending) there will be instances where a specific Python package you wish to use is not pre-installed.

For example, let's say that you *need* to use a koala emoji in your notebook. You can do so by importing the library `emoji` and run the command `print(emoji.emojize(':koala:'))`. If you try to run this code, you will get an error `ModuleNotFoundError: No module named 'emoji'` because Python can't find the library.

```
In [ ]: import emoji # Not available on default Colab environment
        print(emoji.emojize(':koala:'))
```

```
-----
ModuleNotFoundError                                Traceback (most recent call last)
<ipython-input-2-0d329a46eb67> in <cell line: 1>()
----> 1 import emoji # Not available on default Colab environment
      2 print(emoji.emojize(':koala:'))
```

```
ModuleNotFoundError: No module named 'emoji'
```

NOTE: If your import is failing due to a missing package, you can manually install dependencies using either `!pip` or `!apt`.

To view examples of installing some common dependencies, click the "Open Examples" button below.

You can install this library on the Colab instance using the command

```
In [ ]: !pip install emoji
        import emoji
        print(emoji.emojize(':koala:'))
```

Collecting emoji

Downloading emoji-2.8.0-py2.py3-none-any.whl (358 kB)

358.9/358.9 kB 5.5 MB/s eta 0:0

0:00

Installing collected packages: emoji

Successfully installed emoji-2.8.0



However, instances are temporary, get created on the fly when you open the notebook and destroyed when you close it or after some inactivity. So, next time you will open this notebook on another Colab instance (or if you get disconnected) you will need to install again the library.

Try this yourself. Navigate to the upper-right corner of your Colab window, where RAM and Disk usage metrics are displayed, click on the downward-facing arrow and select "Change runtime." You may choose any available option. This action will switch the computational engine (also known as the kernel) powering this notebook. In other words, you are changing the instance (the computer in the cloud) that is doing the computation "under the hood" for your notebook. Given that the new kernel starts with a default configuration that lacks the libraries you previously installed, attempts to display the koala emoji in this new instance will result in an error:

```
In [ ]: import emoji
        print(emoji.emojize(':koala:'))
```



The quick and dirty solution is to reinstall the library at every use. However, usually we use multiple packages in a single notebook. Doing the installation of each of them every time you open a new instance is a huge waste of time that we can avoid using different strategies.

In this notebook we will see how to set up a Colab environment that stores **persistently** the libraries you need in your GDrive.

Step 1: Mount Google Drive

First, mount your Google Drive so that Google Colab can access it. A permission dialog will appear, asking you to log in into your google account (use your unipd credentials) to grant Colab access to read and write files on your Drive. Keep in mind that granting this permission gives Colab a lot of power over the content of your GDrive and that may result in security issues. Once you have granted access to Colab, it can read and write on your Gdrive, and a malicious script could wipe out everything. It is important that you only run notebooks from sources you trust and that you always understand what the code is doing!. Given the risks involved, each time you mount your Gdrive you will be required to manually grant the permissions.

```
In [ ]: from google.colab import drive
        drive.mount("/content/drive")
```

```

-----
MessageError                                Traceback (most recent call last)
<ipython-input-5-bf1647b42bbd> in <cell line: 2>()
      1 from google.colab import drive
----> 2 drive.mount("/content/drive")

/usr/local/lib/python3.10/dist-packages/google/colab/drive.py in mount(mount
point, force_remount, timeout_ms, readonly)
    101 def mount(mountpoint, force_remount=False, timeout_ms=120000, readon
ly=False):
    102     """Mount your Google Drive at the specified mountpoint path."""
--> 103     return _mount(
    104         mountpoint,
    105         force_remount=force_remount,

/usr/local/lib/python3.10/dist-packages/google/colab/drive.py in _mount(moun
tpoint, force_remount, timeout_ms, ephemeral, readonly)
    130     )
    131     if ephemeral:
--> 132         _message.blocking_request(
    133             'request_auth', request={'authType': 'dfs_ephemeral'}, timeo
ut_sec=None
    134         )

/usr/local/lib/python3.10/dist-packages/google/colab/_message.py in blocking
_request(request_type, request, timeout_sec, parent)
    174         request_type, request, parent=parent, expect_reply=True
    175     )
--> 176     return read_reply_from_input(request_id, timeout_sec)

/usr/local/lib/python3.10/dist-packages/google/colab/_message.py in read_rep
ly_from_input(message_id, timeout_sec)
    101     ):
    102         if 'error' in reply:
--> 103             raise MessageError(reply['error'])
    104         return reply.get('data', None)
    105

MessageError: Error: credential propagation was unsuccessful

```

Once the drive is mounted, you can see its contents by clicking the folder icon on the left shoulder of this page. So, if you to store the notebooks of the course on Gdrive it is very easy accessing them.

Step 2: Install Virtual Environment Package

Install the `Venv` package to manage isolated Python environments. Remember that an environment specifies the interpreter used and defines its fundamental settings. Among these setting we are particularly interested at the location where the libraries are stored.

```
In [ ]: !pip install virtualenv
```

Step 3: Create a Virtual Environment

Next, you need to specify the path in your Google Drive where you'd like to create the virtual environment (where to store the interpreter and the other settings). The notebooks of this course will use `"/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy"` as a default one. If you are changing this, you will need to update accordingly the other notebooks (my advice is to just keep this and the following defaults)

```
In [ ]: venv_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy"
!virtualenv $venv_path
```

Step 4: Activate the Virtual Environment

Activate the virtual environment you've just created. By doing so you are telling the notebook that this environment is the one to use.

```
In [ ]: venvBin_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy/bin/activate"
!source $venvBin_path
```

Step 5: Install Desired Packages

Identify the folder in your Google Drive where you'd like to store libraries, and then install the `emoji` package there by using the option `target`.

```
In [ ]: import sys
colabLib_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy/lib/python3.10/site-packages"
!pip install --target=$colabLib_path emoji
```

Step 6: Update System Path

Add the library path to the system path so that Colab can find the newly installed packages. In this way the current notebook knows where to find the libraries.

```
In [ ]: import sys
sys.path.append(colabLib_path)
```

Step 7: Test the Setup

Now you can happily import and use the `emoji` library to print a koala emoji.

```
In [ ]: import emoji
print(emoji.emojize(':koala:'))
```

Using the Custom Environment in Future Sessions

The procedure we followed stored the virtual environment and libraries on your Google Drive. When you will start a new instance you will need to make them accessible to Colab by telling it that you wish to use them and where to find them. Specifically, you'll need to:

1. Mount your Google Drive to make it accessible
2. Activate the previously created virtual environment
3. Tell the environment to search for libraries in your Google Drive

```
In [1]: import sys
from google.colab import drive
drive.mount("/content/drive")
venvBin_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy/bin/activate"
!source $venvBin_path
colabLib_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy/lib/python3.10/site-packages"
sys.path.append(colabLib_path)
```

Mounted at /content/drive

Once that is set up, you will be able to import the libraries and **happily** print your koala emoji without re-installing the library

```
In [2]: import emoji
print(emoji.emojize(':koala:'))
```



Create a custom environment with all the libraries for this course

To be sure to set things properly, start a new instance now. Navigate to the upper-right corner of your Colab window, where RAM and Disk usage metrics are displayed, click on the downward-facing arrow and select "Change runtime." You may choose any available option.

Now run the code below to will install all the packages needed in the course.

```
In [3]: #mounting Gdrive
from google.colab import drive
drive.mount("/content/drive")
#install virtualenv
```

```
!pip install virtualenv
#set path in Gdrive where to store the custom environment
venv_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy"
#create custom environment
!virtualenv $venv_path
#set virtual enviroment activation folder
venvBin_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy/bin/activate"
#activate environment
!source $venvBin_path
#set the path where the environment will store the libraries
colabLib_path = "/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy/lib/python3.10/site-packages"
#set the libraries to install
libraries_to_install = ["jsondate", "jsondiff"]
#install all the libraries in the custom path for libraries
for lib in libraries_to_install:
    !pip install --target=$colabLib_path {lib}
#add the library path to the ones where the instance will search for librari
import sys
sys.path.append(colabLib_path)
#test that the installed libraries can be imported
import jsondate
import jsondiff
```

```

Drive already mounted at /content/drive; to attempt to forcibly remount, call drive.mount("/content/drive", force_remount=True).
Collecting virtualenv
  Downloading virtualenv-20.24.5-py3-none-any.whl (3.7 MB)
    ━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━ 3.7/3.7 MB 19.1 MB/s eta 0:00:00
Collecting distlib<1,>=0.3.7 (from virtualenv)
  Downloading distlib-0.3.7-py2.py3-none-any.whl (468 kB)
    ━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━ 468.9/468.9 kB 28.1 MB/s eta 0:00:00
Requirement already satisfied: filelock<4,>=3.12.2 in /usr/local/lib/python3.10/dist-packages (from virtualenv) (3.12.2)
Requirement already satisfied: platformdirs<4,>=3.9.1 in /usr/local/lib/python3.10/dist-packages (from virtualenv) (3.10.0)
Installing collected packages: distlib, virtualenv
Successfully installed distlib-0.3.7 virtualenv-20.24.5
created virtual environment CPython3.10.12.final.0-64 in 15047ms
  creator CPython3Posix(dest=/content/drive/MyDrive/codepy, clear=False, no_vcs_ignore=False, global=False)
  seeder FromAppData(download=False, pip=bundle, setuptools=bundle, wheel=bundle, via=copy, app_data_dir=/root/.local/share/virtualenv)
    added seed packages: emoji==2.8.0, pip==23.2.1, setuptools==68.2.0, wheel==0.41.2
  activators BashActivator,CShellActivator,FishActivator,NushellActivator,PowerShellActivator,PythonActivator
Collecting jsondate
  Downloading jsondate-0.1.2.tar.gz (3.5 kB)
  Preparing metadata (setup.py) ... done
Building wheels for collected packages: jsondate
  Building wheel for jsondate (setup.py) ... done
  Created wheel for jsondate: filename=jsondate-0.1.2-py3-none-any.whl size=3755 sha256=0f3816022e3d97772d429c1ebd03c61689478f120f37e3fe14de72fd9d497093
  Stored in directory: /root/.cache/pip/wheels/92/9c/b3/dd6fe26644e854f56de7274d10d75e999e3cbc05d6f20faad2
Successfully built jsondate
Installing collected packages: jsondate
Successfully installed jsondate-0.1.2
Collecting jsdiff
  Downloading jsdiff-2.0.0-py3-none-any.whl (6.6 kB)
Installing collected packages: jsdiff
Successfully installed jsdiff-2.0.0

```

That's it, done, you have set up your custom environment on Gdrive so that you can use it with Colab. At the beginning of each notebook of the course you will find a cell that sets up the Gdrive environment. This code will be stored in a markdown cell, because those using the VLEM or with a local installation of anaconda will not need it. But if you chose to use Colab, simply convert it to code and run it. Remember that this will only work if you did not change the default paths during this installation, otherwise you will need to change the paths also in the other notebooks.

If you had problems in running the code of this setup in the right order, or you think you did some mistake in the installation, the simplest solution is to go to your drive, delete

the custom environment folder (the default name is `"codepy"`), start a brand new instance in a new window and re-do the installation.

Notes

Book references:

Ch.1 of [Python for Data Analysis](#)

Preface of [Python Data Science Handbook](#)

Office Hours:

See on my [website](#)

Author: Duccio Gamannossi degl'Innocenti

Web: <https://www.dgdi.me/>

Mail: duccio.gamannossi@unipd.it