Supplementary study guide for COMP130

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This study guide contains brief explanations of content that is not fully explained in the assigned reading from the textbook. Anything that is explained in the assigned textbook reading will not be repeated here. When studying, please use the textbook as the primary reference. Use this study guide only for supplementary information that is not in the textbook.

Contents

[1 input() 2](#_Toc147138867)

[2 random.randint() 2](#_Toc147138868)

[3 for loops 3](#_Toc147138869)

[4 Nested for loops 3](#_Toc147138870)

[5 Constructors 4](#_Toc147138871)

[6 The graphics module and more constructors 4](#_Toc147138872)

[7 Methods and dot notation 5](#_Toc147138873)

[8 Speeding up the turtle and keeping the window open 5](#_Toc147138874)

[9 Alternative import styles: from and as 6](#_Toc147138875)

[10 Setting coordinates in graphics.py 7](#_Toc147138876)

[11 Boolean variables 7](#_Toc147138877)

[12 Using the debugger in IDLE 8](#_Toc147138878)

[13 Printing on the same line 10](#_Toc147138879)

[14 Factoring out repeated code 10](#_Toc147138880)

[15 Enforcing preconditions via guardians and assert 11](#_Toc147138881)

# input()

The built-in input() function is covered fully in section 5.11 of the textbook, but we won’t cover that until week seven of the semester, so this supplementary study guide gives a brief explanation here.

The input() function is used to receive input from the user of the computer program while it is running, as in the following example

answer = input('What is your favorite day of the week? ')

The parameter is a string known as the *prompt*. In the above example, the prompt is 'What is your favorite day of the week? '.

The prompt will be printed. Then, the program waits to receive input from the user. The user is then expected to type their response using the keyboard, terminating the response using the Enter key. The string typed by the user is returned to the program. In the above example, the variable answer will store whatever text was typed by the user.

Here is a complete program demonstrating the use of input():

name = input('Please enter your name. ')

color = input('What is your favorite color? ')

print('Very interesting,', name, '...')

print('I wonder why', color, 'is your favorite color.')

# random.randint()

The use of random numbers is explained in section 13.2 of the textbook, but we need only a small subset of the information provided there. Facilities for using random numbers in Python are made available by importing the random module:

import random

In the first part of the semester, the only function we need is random.randint(a, b). This function returns a random integer between a and b inclusive. For example, the following program simulates rolling two 6-sided dice.

import random

roll1 = random.randint(1, 6)

roll2 = random.randint(1, 6)

total = roll1 + roll2

print('You rolled a', roll1, 'and a', roll2)

print('That gives a total of', total)

# for loops

Section 4.1 and 4.2 provide a very brief introduction to for loops. Here we provide a little more detail. The variable immediately after the for keyword is called the *loop counter*. By default, the loop counter starts counting from zero and increases by 1 each time. For example, the loop counter my\_num counts from 0 up to 5 in the following code fragment:

for my\_num in range(6):

print('This is the start of the loop body.')

print('The loop counter is currently', my\_num)

print('This is the end of the loop body.')

Because the loop counter starts at zero, it counts up to but not including the range parameter. In the above example, the range parameter is 6. The loop is executed six times. The value of the loop counter ranges from 0 to 5 inclusive, which does include exactly six numbers: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

It is often useful to store and update information in variables inside the loop body. For example, the following code calculates the value of :

sum\_of\_squares = 0

for n in range(10):

n\_squared = n\*n

sum\_of\_squares = sum\_of\_squares + n\_squared

print('Sum is', sum\_of\_squares)

# Nested for loops

It is possible to include a for loop inside another for loop. We call this a *nested* for loop. Within a nested loop, the first for loop is called the *outer* loop and the second for loop is called the *inner* loop. The outer and inner loops should use different loop counters, as in the following example using the outer loop counter i and the inner loop counter j:

for i in range(3):

print('Outer loop counter i is', i)

for j in range(2):

print('Inner loop counter j is', j)

print('i + j is', i+j)

print('Outer loop iteration is finishing, and i is still', i)

Note the extra indentation of the inner loop body. Also note that the inner loop body in the above example is executed a total of six times. There are two iterations in the inner loop, but these two iterations are themselves executed three times by the outer loop, for a total of .

One common application of nested for loops is drawing two-dimensional grids in graphics applications. For example, the following code will draw circles of radius 4 in a rectangular grid spacing of 20 pixels, assuming we have already created a Turtle object t:

for i in range(3):

x = 20 \* i

for j in range(5):

y = 20 \* j

t.penup()

t.goto(x, y)

t.pendown()

t.circle(4)

# Constructors

We already know about datatypes. In computer programming, the word *class* can mean the same thing as *datatype*. Although there are certain technical distinctions between a class and a datatype, we will treat them as the same thing in this course. In computer programming, an *object* is an *instance* of a class. We create an object using a special kind of function called a *constructor*. The name of the constructor is always the same as the name of the class. For example, the following line of code calls the Turtle constructor inside the turtle module, creating an instance of the Turtle class:

my\_turtle = turtle.Turtle()

There are several important things to notice about this line of code:

* Python identifiers are case-sensitive, so turtle and Turtle are completely separate, different entities. In fact, lowercase turtle is the name of a module that can be imported. Uppercase Turtle is the name of a class (or datatype) that is defined in the turtle module.
* When we add parentheses after the word Turtle, it becomes the constructor Turtle() -- a special kind of function that is used to create a new object (or instance) in the Turtle class. Constructors can have parameters, but this one has a zero parameters.
* The variable my\_turtle refers to the new object that was created by the constructor. The datatype of this variable is Turtle.

# The graphics module and more constructors

Other examples of constructors are provided in the graphics module created by John M. Zelle. This module is not built in to Python. You must download the graphics.py file and save it in your current working folder before you can import this module using import graphics. A link is provided on the course webpages.

The following code creates a Point object and a Circle object.

p = graphics.Point(50, 100)

c = graphics.Circle(p, 25)

The variable p refers to an object which is an instance of the Point class, located at . The variable c refers to an object which is an instance of the Circle class. The center of this circle is located at p, and it has radius 25 units. The online documentation of the graphics module explains these constructor parameters in more detail. It also explains the constructors of several other classes such as Line, Rectangle, and Text.

# Methods and dot notation

A *method* is a special kind of function which performs an action on an object. For example, given the my\_turtle object defined earlier, we can use the forward method of the Turtle class to move this object forward 100 pixels:

my\_turtle.forward(100)

Methods are always invoked using *dot notation*, which has the format **object.method(parameters)**.

In Python, dot notation is ambiguous. It can also be used to invoke a *function* inside a module, using the format **module.function(parameters)**. For example random.randint() invokes the randint function from the random module. Another example would be turtle.clear(), which invokes the clear function from the turtle module. It does not perform an action on any specific Turtle object, but clears the entire turtle module graphics system. Contrast this with my\_turtle.forward(100), which invokes the forward method on the specific object my\_turtle.

# Speeding up the turtle and keeping the window open

For experiments with the turtle module, the default animation speed can be too slow. This can be adjusted using:

* turtle.tracer(), a function in the turtle module; and/or
* Turtle.speed(), a method in the Turtle class

You can find out more details of the above function and method in the online documentation of the turtle module. However, for this course, the following information is all you need to know:

* Place the command turtle.tracer(100) near the start of your top-level code
* Place the commands

|  |
| --- |
| turtle.update() turtle.mainloop() |

at the end of your top-level code.

Explanation:

* The command turtle.tracer(100) will make all turtle animations extremely fast, because it will update the screen 100 times less frequently than the default. There is no need to adjust the speed of individual Turtle objects via Turtle.speed().
* We need turtle.update() at the end because some of the screen updates at the end of the program may have been skipped.
* On some Python systems, we need turtle.mainloop() to keep the turtle window open.

# Alternative import styles: from and as

To import a module such as graphics.py, we have been using the command import graphics. An alternative way to import a module is using the from … import \*, as in the following example:

from graphics import \*

The from style of import allows you to use items from the imported module without dot notation. For example, after using from graphics import \*, we can write

window = GraphWin("My graphics window", 300, 300)

instead of

window = graphics.GraphWin("My graphics window", 300, 300)

We will mostly avoid the from style, because it can lead to many names being defined at the top level in your Python program. This is sometimes referred to as *polluting the global namespace*. We want to avoid polluting the global namespace, because a large program can become confusing and unmanageable when many names are defined at the top level. In this course, however, we are mostly writing small programs, and it is acceptable to use the from style if desired.

To save typing, and to enhance the readability of your program, a good alternative is to import a module using an *abbreviation*. We can do this using the import … as … form. For example, we can use

import graphics as gr

Now we can refer to content from the graphics module using the abbreviation gr, as in the following example:

window = gr.GraphWin("My graphics window", 300, 300)

# Setting coordinates in graphics.py

In many computer graphics applications, the origin is at the **top** left of the screen. In this situation, the  axis points to the right as usual, but the  axis points downwards, so the **positive  direction is down**. This is the default coordinate system for the graphics module.

To use the more familiar coordinate system, in which the origin is at the **bottom** left, the positive  direction is to the right, and the **positive  direction is up**, we can use the window.setCoords() function. For example, the following code creates a graphics window of size 300 pixels by 300 pixels and sets up a standard mathematical coordinate system with the origin at the bottom left.

import graphics as gr

window\_size = 300

window = gr.GraphWin("graphics window with origin at bottom left", window\_size, window\_size)

window.setCoords(0, 0, window\_size, window\_size)

# Boolean variables

From the textbook we are familiar with the data type bool, which can be either True or False. We can use and manipulate variables with this data type too. We call them Boolean variables. The code below demonstrates this, using the two Boolean variables happy and sad.

happy = True

sad = not happy

if happy:

print("I'm happy")

else:

print("I'm not happy")

if sad:

print("I'm sad")

else:

print("I'm not sad")

print('The statement "I am happy" is', happy)

print('The statement "I am not happy" is', not happy)

print('The statement "I am sad" is', sad)

print('The statement "I am not sad" is', not sad)

We can use Boolean variables to build up more complex Boolean expressions, as in the if statement below.

excited = False

if happy and excited:

print('What a fantastic day!')

elif happy:

print("This is a good day. I'm happy but not excited.")

We can also use the bool data type in parameters:

def umbrella\_advice(is\_raining):

if is\_raining:

print('Take your umbrella')

else:

print('No need for an umbrella right now.')

umbrella\_advice(True)

# Using the debugger in IDLE

There are many ways to use the debugger in IDLE. The following instructions describe one possible method.

1. A screenshot of a computer

   Description automatically generatedIn the IDLE Shell window, go to Debug menu and choose Debugger.
2. A screenshot of a computer

   Description automatically generatedCheck the Source box in the Debug Control window.
3. Go to the window containing your Python source code. Turn on line numbers. Right-click on the line where you would like the program to freeze, and choose Set Breakpoint.

A screenshot of a computer program

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1. Run the program as usual, via Run Module in the Run menu. The program will freeze at the first line of code. In the Debug Control window, click Go.

A screenshot of a computer

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1. The program will run until it hits the breakpoint that you set previously. Note the local variables listed in the lower pane. Variables in the other stack frames can be viewed by double clicking on different parts of the stack, in the upper pane.

A screenshot of a computer program

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1. Experiment on your own with Step, Over, and Out. The basic definitions are:

* **Step** executes one line of code (and steps inside any function on the current line).
* **Over** executes one line of code (but steps over any function on the current line).
* **Out** steps out of the current function by finishing the remaining lines in the current function and returning to the calling function, one level up in the call stack.

# Printing on the same line

By default, the print function adds a special character, called a *newline*, to its output. The output of the next print function will then appear on a new line. If you wish the output to appear on the same line, you can set the end parameter of print to the empty string:

print('hi ', end='')

print('how ', end='')

print('are ', end='')

print('you')

The above code prints 'hi how are you', all on the same line.

# Factoring out repeated code

The textbook section 4.7 explains the general concept of *refactoring*. Here we explain a special type of refactoring, known as *factoring out repeated code*. We do this when some code is repeated in two or more locations, as in the following example.

def roll\_sixsided\_dice(num\_dice):

total = 0

for i in range(num\_dice):

roll = random.randint(1, 6)

total = total + roll

print('Dice total is', total)

def roll\_eightsided\_dice(num\_dice):

total = 0

for i in range(num\_dice):

roll = random.randint(1, 8)

total = total + roll

print('Dice total is', total)

The repeated code could be identical, or it may contain slight differences. In the above example, the repeated code is highlighted in gray, and some slight differences are highlighted in yellow.

We factor out the repeated code by copying it into a new function. Sometimes, we need to add parameters to the new function. In the following example, we use the variable num\_dice as one parameter and we generalize by incorporating the new parameter num\_sides. The new parameter is needed to allow for the slight differences in the repeated code highlighted above.

def roll\_dice(num\_dice, num\_sides):

total = 0

for i in range(num\_dice):

roll = random.randint(1, num\_sides)

total = total + roll

print('Dice total is', total)

Finally, we eliminate the original repeated code, replacing it with invocations of the new function:

def roll\_sixsided\_dice(num\_dice):

roll\_dice(num\_dice, 6)

def roll\_eightsided\_dice(num\_dice):

roll\_dice(num\_dice, 8)

There are two reasons that we should factor out repeated code. First, the code is more *maintainable*: if we need to make changes, it is quicker and less error-prone to change the single function that was factored out, compared to changing both versions of the repeated code. Second, the code is usually easier to read and understand after repeated code has been factored out.

When refactoring code: the functionality of the code must remain the same (so it produces exactly the same outputs); and the interface of the code must remain the same (so the signatures of existing functions cannot be altered in any way).

# Enforcing preconditions via guardians and assert

Section 4.10 of the textbook mentions *preconditions*. A precondition is a requirement that should be true before a function can execute. There are many ways of enforcing preconditions. In this course, we use a simple approach that employs Python’s assert statement. The assert statement tests if a given condition is true, then immediately halts the program if the condition is false. When we use the assert statement to enforce a precondition, we refer to the statement as a *guardian*. This is because it guards the function from violations of the preconditions. Consider the print\_course\_code function below. The subject parameter is intended to be a string such as 'comp' or 'math' or 'data', corresponding to one of the subjects in Dickinson’s course catalog. The number parameter should be an integer course number such as 130 or 232. The three guardian statements ensure that the parameters are reasonable before the rest of the function executes.

def print\_course\_code(subject, number):

assert isinstance(subject, str)

assert isinstance(number, int)

assert number>=100 and number<600

print('Course code is', subject.upper() + str(number))

The builtin Python function isinstance is especially useful in guardians. We use it to check that the datatype of a parameter is correct.

We can optionally add a meaningful error message to a guardian statement, as shown in the following example.

def print\_course\_code(subject, number):

assert isinstance(subject, str), 'subject must be a string'

assert isinstance(number, int), 'number must be an integer'

assert number>=100 and number<600, 'course number outside expected range'

print('Course code is', subject.upper() + str(number))

# More flexible versions of range()

We already know that an expression like range(5) produces a range of values up to but not including 5, in this case: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4. If we want to start at a value other than 0, we can use an expression like range(3, 7), which produces a range of values beginning at 3, up to but not including 7, in this case: 3, 4, 5, 6. We can also produce a range of values with the step size other than 1. For example, range(12, 29, 5) produces a range of values beginning at 12, up to but not including 29, stepping by 5, in this case: 12, 17, 22, 27.