Daily Coding Problem #143

Problem

This problem was asked by Amazon.

Given a pivot `x`, and a list `lst`, partition the list into three parts.

- The first part contains all elements in `lst` that are less than `x`
- The second part contains all elements in `lst` that are equal to `x`
- The third part contains all elements in `lst` that are larger than `x`

Ordering within a part can be arbitrary.

For example, given `x = 10` and `lst = [9, 12, 3, 5, 14, 10, 10]`, one partition may be `[9, 3, 5, 10, 10, 12, 14]`.

Solution

This question has a relatively simple O(1) space and O(n) time solution involving few passes.

- In the first pass, put all elements in `lst < x` to the front
- In the second pass, put all elements in `lst > x` to the end

One way to do it in one pass is to keep three variables, `i`, `j`, and `k`, with these invariants:

- All elements in `lst[:i]` are less than `x`
- All elements in `lst[i:j]` are equal to `x`
- All elements in `lst[k + 1:]` are greater than `x`

Then we iterate with `j` and put `lst[j]` according to the above invariants.

```
def partition(lst, x):
    i = 0
    j = 0
    k = len(lst) - 1

    while j < k:
        if lst[j] == x:
            j += 1
        elif lst[j] < x:
            lst[i], lst[j] = lst[j], lst[i]
            i += 1
            j += 1
        else:
            lst[j], lst[k] = lst[k], lst[j]
            k -= 1

    return lst
```

This will take only O(1) space and O(n) time.