

Introduction to Julia

Foreword

`julia` is a language which I have a love-hate relationship with. If the first programming language you learned is `python`, I think `julia` offers a fresh take on what you can do with computers while having the interactiveness of `python`. It has a lot of modern features built into the language, such as its just-in-time (JIT) compilation, multiple dispatch, and metaprogramming capabilities. It also comes with its own package manager, which is quite nice to use. This makes `julia` a great “advance” language for data scientists to learn after `python`. However, the `julia` ecosystem is not nearly as mature as `python`, as a lot of its packages are maintained by small communities, and some time they lead to down some dead ends.

Nonetheless, `julia` is a fun language to play with. `julia` often offers more flexibility and performance than `python`, and its ecosystem has a lot of interesting research codes which are often not found in other ecosystem. So in this lab, we are going to go through

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Key Concepts

Julia has a JIT compiler

Julia has multiple dispatch

For the people who learn `python` as their first programming language, and perhaps engaged in some projects related to `python`, you may find `julia` quite odd in the sense that **it does not have classes**.

Julia has a package manager

Basic Syntax

Variables

Functions

It is fair to say `julia` centers around writing functions

Control Flow

Exercise: Writing an insertion sort algorithm again

Step 1: Clone the repository

Step 2: Implement the sorting algorithm

Step 3: Test the algorithm

Packaging code

Packaging code in `julia` could take a while to get used to. Instead of creating submodules by directories and `__init__.py`, fundamentally in `julia` you just `include("file.jl")` in your main module. Any subdirectories is just to group those files together. And instead of using syntax like `from scipy.optimize import minimize` to import a function from a submodules, one needs to export functions that are written such that they can be imported by the main module.

Step 0: Looking at some examples

Have a look these three examples: [DifferentialEquations.jl](#), [Flux.jl](#), and [CUDA.jl](#).

Step 1: Create the main module

Step 2: Create a sub-module

Building documentation

Documenter.jl

Writing tests

Introduction to Julia

Best practices

All roads lead to Rome

In `python`, the intention of the language is to have only one obvious way to a solution. Although that is often violated and people dunk on their motto, it is still largely true. Creating modules, writing classes, and writing tests, they can all be done in a similar fashion. On the other hand, there are many ways to do the same thing in `julia`. We have seen the three different ways to build your package hierarchy, and the support of metaprogramming in `julia` together with multiple dispatch allows you to come with wild solutions to your problems.

Type stability

Write functions

This is something that took me a while to really understand what do they mean by

Development tips

Noteworthy libraries