

Coding Style Guide

Introduction to Python Programming

2022-2023



The following mild coding standard ensures easily readable and modifiable Python source code. This standard is based on ¹, where much more detailed rules, motivations, and examples can be found. The notes below explain these rules.

1. Be consistent when using the freedom that this standard leaves.
2. *Always* indent *systematically* a **multiple of 4 spaces**. *Never* use TAB characters in source code. (Let your editor expand the TAB key to spaces. Jupyter Notebook already does this)
3. *Always* limit the line length to **at most 80 characters**. (Set a right margin.)
4. *Always* use **one empty line before and after** the following cases:
 - functions
 - classes are surrounded by two white lines instead

White lines can be used to separate *groups* of statements or assignments to enhance readability

5. *Never* write a space before and *always* write **one space after** the following items (*unless* at line end):
 - `,` `:`
6. *Always* write **one space before and after** the following items (*unless* at line begin/end):
 - keywords: **`if`** **`for`** **`while`** etc.
 - binary operators (*except* `.`): `=` `+` `-` `*` `/` `%` `==` `!=` `<` `>` `<=` `>=` `&&` `||` etc.
7. *Always* explain each variable declaration in a **comment**.
8. *Always* specify each public entity (Classes and functions) with a **docstring comment**.
9. Variable, function and class names should *always* **reflect the usage rather than the implementation**.
10. *Always* use the associated name conventions for different objects:
 - Use **CapWords** for class names
 - Use **lowercase with words separated by underscores** for function and variable names

Consistency

Indentation

Line length

Empty lines

Spacing 1

Spacing 2

Comments

Docstring

Naming 1

Naming 2

- Use **All caps with words separated by underscores** for the name of constants

11. Always add **type hints** to functions using `':'` or `'->'`

Type Hints

Notes

Well-organized source code is important for several reasons.

- The compiler may not care about this, but source code is also read by others: developers, reviewers, maintainers, teachers, graders, ...
- It is an important means to *prevent defects*.
- It facilitates *localization of defects*, both by the author, and by others.

Here is some further background information on each of the rules.

1. Consistency especially plays a role in the placement of opening braces . Either place them at the end of the line with the controlling statement, or at the beginning of a line by themselves directly below the the controlling statement. An advantage of the latter style is that opening and closing braces are vertically aligned. A disadvantage is that it takes more vertical space.

Consistency

2. Indentation provides visual clues about the containment structure (*nesting*). One or two space indentation does not provide enough visually guidance. Some standards prescribe indenting by multiples of three spaces (because that interferes with TAB characters, thereby discouraging them even more). Indenting by more than four spaces is a waste, and leaves less room in view of the line length limit (also see the next note).

Indentation

3. Your screen may fit longer lines, but you are not the only one reading the source code. Moreover, long lines are hard to parse. Also see next note.

Line length

Avoid long lines by introducing auxiliary variables, methods, or classes (e.g., to group multiple parameters).

If a long line is unavoidable, break it at an appropriate place, and continue on the next line.

Of course, the line length of generated code may not be under your control.

4. Empty lines provide visual clues about *grouping*, on an intermediate level (also see next two notes). Besides the situations mentioned in Rule 4, it is good to delineate *groups of related statements*

Empty lines

by empty lines; for example, needed loop variable declarations, the loop, and finalization of the loop. By the way, such grouping can also be made explicit by *brackets*, defining a *block*, possibly with its own local variables.

Avoid long blocks of statements by introducing auxiliary methods (Extra functions).

5. Spacing also provides visual clues about *grouping*, but on a lower level than empty lines (see preceding note; also see next note).

This rule concerns *punctuation*.

Commas are used to separate items in lists, such as *parameters* (both formal and actual), and expressions.

There should never be multiple *colons* on the same line.

Spacing 1

6. Spacing improves readability, especially when quickly scanning source code, rather than reading it slowly in full detail.

Readability of expressions can be further improved by appropriate use of *parentheses*, and *auxiliary variables and functions*.

Spacing 2

7. Variables are introduced for a specific purpose. The name of the variable should reflect that purpose. However, a name should also not be too long. Furthermore, the purpose usually involves relationships to other elements of the program. A comment makes this explicit. To avoid having to spend any effort on deciding whether to include a comment or not, the rule is simply to provide it always.

It is also good practice to provide comments with non-obvious statements. However, there is such a thing as *superfluous* comments. Do not comment the obvious.

Comments

8. Public entities are typically classes, methods, functions and (non-local) constants. Public entities can be used anywhere in a program. Therefore, their usage should be well documented. Docstring comments have two benefits over ordinary (non-docstring) comments:

- They support additional features, such as *tags*, to structure documentation.
- They can be extracted from the source code and presented separately, as a document with cross references.

Docstring

Many Python Integrated Development Environments (IDEs) provide additional benefits when using docstring comments. Docstring comments can be identified by the triple quotes and often span multiple lines

```
""" This is a docstring """
```

9. Variables, Functions and Classes are introduced for a specific purpose. The name of the variable should reflect that purpose. But names can also give visual clues to the usage. Using different types of names helps with quickly interpreting code.

Naming

- Class names should *always* start with a capital letter so classes are easily spotted. Any additional words in the class name should also start with a capital letter. This is the CapWords convention (E.g. KittenShop).
- Functions and variables should be written in lowercase with words separated by underscores. For functions it is also allowed to use camelCase, where the first word starts with a lowercase letter but the other words start with uppercase (E.g. kittenShop), but all lowercase is preferred.
- Constants are written in all caps to remind developers that these values should not and will not be changed (E.g. MAX-VALUE).

10. Functions often only allow a specific type of variables to be given as parameters. Because code is often created in (large) groups, others may not know what variable types are allowed in a function and which ones are not. Type hints help developers so that they don't have to carefully look through (complex) functions to be able to use these functions.

Type Hints

By adding type hints ...

- to the function, a coder can quickly know what type the function returns and use the function without exactly knowing what the outcome could be.

Example:

```
def example(var1) -> TYPE:
```

- to the parameters, someone can quickly see what types the variables should be, before they can successfully use the function. The only parameter that doesn't need a type hint is the parameter 'self'. This parameter is standard for methods but does not need an explicit type hint. (This is used in classes).

Example:

```
def example(var1: TYPE):
```

Note: It is rumoured that Python might update at some point to change type hints from voluntary to mandatory.

References

- [1] *Style Guide for Python Code*. PEP 8, 2001.
<https://www.python.org/dev/peps/pep-0008/>

References