The benefit of `%timeit` is that for short commands it will automatically perform multiple runs in order to attain more robust results. For multiline statements, adding a second `%` sign will turn this into a cell magic that can handle multiple lines of input. For example, here's the equivalent construction with a `for` loop:

```
In [9]: %%timeit
   ...: L = []
   ...: for n in range(1000):
   ...:     L.append(n ** 2)
   ...:
1000 loops, best of 3: 373 µs per loop
```

We can immediately see that list comprehensions are about 10% faster than the equivalent `for` loop construction in this case. We'll explore `%timeit` and other approaches to timing and profiling code in "Profiling and Timing Code" on page 25.

Help on Magic Functions: ?, %magic, and %lsmagic

Like normal Python functions, IPython magic functions have docstrings, and this useful documentation can be accessed in the standard manner. So, for example, to read the documentation of the `%timeit` magic, simply type this:

```
In [10]: %timeit?
```

Documentation for other functions can be accessed similarly. To access a general description of available magic functions, including some examples, you can type this:

```
In [11]: %magic
```

For a quick and simple list of all available magic functions, type this:

```
In [12]: %lsmagic
```

Finally, I'll mention that it is quite straightforward to define your own magic functions if you wish. We won't discuss it here, but if you are interested, see the references listed in "More IPython Resources" on page 30.

Input and Output History

Previously we saw that the IPython shell allows you to access previous commands with the up and down arrow keys, or equivalently the Ctrl-p/Ctrl-n shortcuts. Additionally, in both the shell and the notebook, IPython exposes several ways to obtain the output of previous commands, as well as string versions of the commands themselves. We'll explore those here.

IPython's In and Out Objects

By now I imagine you're quite familiar with the `In[1]:`/`Out[1]:` style prompts used by IPython. But it turns out that these are not just pretty decoration: they give a clue as to how you can access previous inputs and outputs in your current session. Imagine you start a session that looks like this:

```
In [1]: import math

In [2]: math.sin(2)
Out[2]: 0.9092974268256817

In [3]: math.cos(2)
Out[3]: -0.4161468365471424
```

We've imported the built-in `math` package, then computed the sine and the cosine of the number 2. These inputs and outputs are displayed in the shell with `In`/`Out` labels, but there's more—IPython actually creates some Python variables called `In` and `Out` that are automatically updated to reflect this history:

```
In [4]: print(In)
['', 'import math', 'math.sin(2)', 'math.cos(2)', 'print(In)']

In [5]: Out
Out[5]: {2: 0.9092974268256817, 3: -0.4161468365471424}
```

The `In` object is a list, which keeps track of the commands in order (the first item in the list is a placeholder so that `In[1]` can refer to the first command):

```
In [6]: print(In[1])
import math
```

The `Out` object is not a list but a dictionary mapping input numbers to their outputs (if any):

```
In [7]: print(Out[2])
0.9092974268256817
```

Note that not all operations have outputs: for example, `import` statements and `print` statements don't affect the output. The latter may be surprising, but makes sense if you consider that `print` is a function that returns `None`; for brevity, any command that returns `None` is not added to `Out`.

Where this can be useful is if you want to interact with past results. For example, let's check the sum of `sin(2) ** 2` and `cos(2) ** 2` using the previously computed results:

```
In [8]: Out[2] ** 2 + Out[3] ** 2
Out[8]: 1.0
```

The result is `1.0` as we'd expect from the well-known trigonometric identity. In this case, using these previous results probably is not necessary, but it can become very handy if you execute a very expensive computation and want to reuse the result!

Underscore Shortcuts and Previous Outputs

The standard Python shell contains just one simple shortcut for accessing previous output; the variable _ (i.e., a single underscore) is kept updated with the previous output; this works in IPython as well:

```
In [9]: print(_)
1.0
```

But IPython takes this a bit further—you can use a double underscore to access the second-to-last output, and a triple underscore to access the third-to-last output (skipping any commands with no output):

```
In [10]: print(__)
-0.4161468365471424

In [11]: print(___)
0.9092974268256817
```

IPython stops there: more than three underscores starts to get a bit hard to count, and at that point it's easier to refer to the output by line number.

There is one more shortcut we should mention, however—a shorthand for `Out[X]` is `_X` (i.e., a single underscore followed by the line number):

```
In [12]: Out[2]
Out[12]: 0.9092974268256817

In [13]: _2
Out[13]: 0.9092974268256817
```

Suppressing Output

Sometimes you might wish to suppress the output of a statement (this is perhaps most common with the plotting commands that we'll explore in Chapter 4). Or maybe the command you're executing produces a result that you'd prefer not to store in your output history, perhaps so that it can be deallocated when other references are removed. The easiest way to suppress the output of a command is to add a semicolon to the end of the line:

```
In [14]: math.sin(2) + math.cos(2);
```

Note that the result is computed silently, and the output is neither displayed on the screen or stored in the `Out` dictionary:

```
In [15]: 14 in Out
Out[15]: False
```