What is Python?

# Executive Summary

Python is an **interpreted**, **object-oriented**, **high-level** programming language with dynamic semantics. Its high-level built in data structures, combined with dynamic typing and dynamic binding, make it very attractive for *Rapid Application Development*, as well as for use as a *scripting or glue language* to connect existing components together. Python's simple, easy to learn syntax emphasizes readability and therefore reduces the cost of program maintenance. Python supports modules and packages, which encourages program modularity and code reuse. The Python interpreter and the extensive standard library are available in source or binary form without charge for all major platforms and can be freely distributed.

Often, programmers fall in love with Python because of the increased productivity it provides. Since there is *no compilation step*, the edit-test-debug cycle is **incredibly fast**. Debugging Python programs is easy: a bug or bad input will never cause a segmentation fault. Instead, when the interpreter discovers an error, it raises an exception. When the program doesn't catch the exception, the interpreter prints a stack trace. A source level debugger allows inspection of local and global variables, evaluation of arbitrary expressions, setting breakpoints, stepping through the code a line at a time, and so on. The debugger is written in Python itself, testifying to Python's introspective power. On the other hand, often the quickest way to debug a program is to add a few print statements to the source: the fast edit-test-debug cycle makes this simple approach very effective.

## Comparing Python to Other Languages

Python is often compared to other interpreted languages such as Java, JavaScript, Perl, Tcl, or Smalltalk. Comparisons to C++, Common Lisp and Scheme can also be enlightening. In this section I will briefly compare Python to each of these languages. These comparisons concentrate on language issues only. In practice, the choice of a programming language is often dictated by other real-world constraints such as cost, availability, training, and prior investment, or even emotional attachment. Since these aspects are highly variable, it seems a waste of time to consider them much for this comparison.

### Java

Python programs are generally expected to run slower than Java programs, but they also take much less time to develop. Python programs are typically 3-5 times shorter than equivalent Java programs. This difference can be attributed to Python's built-in high-level data types and its dynamic typing. For example, a Python programmer wastes no time declaring the types of arguments or variables, and Python's powerful polymorphic list and dictionary types, for which rich syntactic support is built straight into the language, find a use in almost every Python program. Because of the run-time typing, Python's run time must work harder than Java's. For example, when evaluating the expression a+b, it must first inspect the objects a and b to find out their type, which is not known at compile time. It then invokes the appropriate addition operation, which may be an overloaded user-defined method. Java, on the other hand, can perform an efficient integer or floating point addition, but requires variable declarations for a and b, and does not allow overloading of the + operator for instances of user-defined classes.

## Javascript

Python's "object-based" subset is roughly equivalent to JavaScript. Like JavaScript (and unlike Java), Python supports a programming style that uses simple functions and variables without engaging in class definitions. However, for JavaScript, that's all there is. Python, on the other hand, supports writing much larger programs and better code reuse through a true object-oriented programming style, where classes and inheritance play an important role.

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| **News Type** | **Latest News** |
| Version | Python 3.1.4 Alpha is now available |
| Survey | Join the Python Developer Survey |
| Release | Python 3.1.3.0 releases |

**Python** is a [high-level](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High-level_programming_language), [general-purpose programming language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General-purpose_programming_language). Its design philosophy emphasizes [code readability](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_readability) with the use of [significant indentation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Significant_indentation). Python is [dynamically typed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_system#DYNAMIC) and [garbage-collected](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garbage_collection_(computer_science)). It supports multiple [programming paradigms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Programming_paradigm), including [structured](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structured_programming) (particularly [procedural](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procedural_programming)), [object-oriented](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object-oriented) and [functional programming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Functional_programming). It is often described as a "batteries included" language due to its