PyQGIS in a Day

Learn the QGIS Python API from the groud up

Table of Contents

This course is also offered as a in-person class. Please visit [www.spatialthoughts.com](http://www.spatialtohughts.com) to see the schedule for upcoming sessions.

# Introduction

This class introduces the concepts of Python programming within the QGIS environment. We will cover the full breadth of topics that involve everything from using the Python Console to building a fully functional plugin. We will also explore GUI programming techniques for customizing the QGIS interface using Qt widgets.

# Get the Data Package

The code examples in this class use a variety of datasets. All the required layers, project files, icons etc. are available in the pyqgis\_in\_a\_day.zip. Download and unzip this file to the Downloads directory. All scripts assume the data is available in the <home folder>/Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/ directory.

# Where can you use Python in QGIS?

* Issue commands from Python Console
* Write custom expressions
* Write custom actions
* Create new processing algorithms
* Create plugins
* Automatically run python code when QGIS starts
* Create custom standalone applications

# Qt, PyQt and PyQGIS

## Qt

[Qt](https://www.qt.io/) is a free and open-source widget toolkit for creating graphical user interfaces as well as cross-platform applications.

QGIS is built using the Qt platform. Both QT and QGIS itself have well-documented APIs that should be used when writing Python code to be run within QGIS.

## PyQt

[PyQt](https://wiki.python.org/moin/PyQt) is the Python interface to Qt. PyQt provides classes and functions to interact with Qt widgets.

## PyQGIS

QGIS provides a Python API (Application Programming Interface), commonly known as PyQGIS. [PyQGIS](https://docs.qgis.org/testing/en/docs/pyqgis_developer_cookbook/) is created using SIP and integrates with PyQt.

***Fun Fact:*** Most QGIS class names start with the prefix *Qgs*. **Q** is for QT and **gs** stands for Gary Sherman - the founder of the QGIS project.

C++ API documentation is available at <https://qgis.org/api/>

Python API documentation is available at <https://qgis.org/pyqgis/3.0>

Both C++ and Python APIs are identical for most part, but certain functions are not available in the Python API. [[1]](#footnote-34)

# Hello World!

QGIS Comes with a built-in **Python Console** and a code editor where you can write and run Python code.

Go to **Plugins → Python Console** to open the console.



At the >>> prompt, type in the following command and press Enter.

print('Hello World!')

Here you are running Python’s *print()* function with the text ‘Hello World’. The output of the statement will be printed below.



While console is useful for typing 1-2 lines of code or printing information contained in a variable, you should use the built-in editor for typing longer scripts or code snippets. Click the *Show Editor* button to open the editor panel. Enter the code and click the *Run Script* button to execute it. The results will appear in the console as before. If you are working on a longer script, you can also click the *Save* button in the editor to save the script for future use.



# Understanding Classes

Before we dive it to PyQGIS, it is important to understand certain concepts related to C++ and Python Classes. Qt as well as QGIS is written in C++ language. Functionality of each Qt/QGIS Widget is implemented as a class - having certain properties and functions. When we use PyQt or PyQGIS classes, it is executing the code in the C++ classes via the python bindings.

## Classes vs Objects

A class can be thought of as a template. You cannot use it directly. To use it in a program, you must create an ‘instance’ of it - which uses the template along with the supplied parameters to create an instance of the class. This is known as an object.

mb = QMessageBox()

The QMessageBox is a PyQt class for creating a dialog with buttons. To use the class, you create object by *instantiating* the class. Here mb is an object, which is an instance of the QMessageBox class, created using the default parameters.

## Inspecting Objects

type() tells you what is the class of the object

type(mb)

dir returns list of the attributes and methods of any object

dir(mb)

## Methods (or functions)

Classes have methods that provide functionality. You can run the class methods on instance objects. For the QMessageBox class, setText() method will add a text to the dialog.

mb = QMessageBox()  
mb.setText('Click OK to confirm')

## Instance Attributes

Classes have 2 types of attributes - class attributes and instance attributes. Qt provides access functions for instance attributes. For the QMessageBox class, there is a text() method to get the text attribute of the mb instance.

mb = QMessageBox()  
mb.setText('Click OK to confirm')  
print(mb.text())

## Class Attributes

Classes also have class attributes which are shared across all instances. The QMessageBox class has Ok and Cancel attributes, which can be referred using QMessageBox.Ok and QMessageBox.Cancel.

mb = QMessageBox()  
mb.setText('Click OK to confirm')  
mb.setStandardButtons(QMessageBox.Ok | QMessageBox.Cancel)

## Inheritance

QObject is the most basic class in Qt. All Qt widgets and QGIS classes inherit from QObject. The most basic widget is the QWidget. QWidget contains most properties that are used to describe a window, or a widget, like position and size, mouse cursor, tooltips, etc. The QDialog class is the base class of dialog windows. QMessageBox is a specialized QDialog.



## Putting it all together

Try out this simple example which constructs a confirmation dialog using PyQt. You can type the code in the **Editor** and click **Run Script**.

mb = QMessageBox()  
mb.setText('Click OK to confirm')  
mb.setStandardButtons(QMessageBox.Ok | QMessageBox.Cancel)  
mb.exec()



# Visual Tour of the PyQGIS API

The QgisInterface class provides methods for interaction with the QGIS environment. When QGIS is running, a variable called iface is set up to provide an object of the class QgisInterface to interact with the running QGIS environment. This interface allows access to the map canvas, menus, toolbars and other parts of the QGIS application. Python Console and Plugins can use iface to access various parts of the QGIS interface.

## QGIS Main Window

**iface.mainWindow()**



### Change Title

title = iface.mainWindow().windowTitle()  
new\_title = title.replace('QGIS', 'My QGIS')  
iface.mainWindow().setWindowTitle(new\_title)

### Change Icon

import os  
  
icon = 'qgis-black.png'  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
icon\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, icon)  
icon = QIcon(icon\_path)  
iface.mainWindow().setWindowIcon(icon)



## Menus

**iface.projectMenu()**

**iface.vectorMenu()**

**iface.viewMenu()**

**iface.helpMenu()**

**…**



### Remove Raster and Vector Menus

vector\_menu = iface.vectorMenu()  
raster\_menu = iface.rasterMenu()  
menubar = vector\_menu.parentWidget()  
menubar.removeAction(vector\_menu.menuAction())  
menubar.removeAction(raster\_menu.menuAction())





### Add A New Menu Item

#### Signals and Slots

GUI programming requires responding to user’s actions. All objects in Qt have a mechanism where they can emit a signal when there is a change in status. i.e. when a user *clicks* a button, or a window is *closed*. As a programmer, you can connect the signal to a slot (i.e. a python function) which will be called when the signal is emitted. The general syntax for connecting the signal to a slot is as follows

object.signal.connect(function)

A new button or menu item is created using QAction(). Here we create an action and then connect the *click* signal to a method that opens a website.

import webbrowser  
  
def open\_website():  
 webbrowser.open('https://gis.stackexchange.com')  
  
website\_action = QAction('Go to gis.stackexchange')  
website\_action.triggered.connect(open\_website)  
iface.helpMenu().addSeparator()  
iface.helpMenu().addAction(website\_action)



## Toolbars

**iface.pluginToolBar()**

**iface.attributesToolBar()**

**iface.mapNavToolToolBar()**

**…**



### Change Visibility of a Toolbar

iface.pluginToolBar().setVisible(True)

### Add a button to a toolbar

import os  
from datetime import datetime  
  
icon = 'question.svg'  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
icon\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, icon)  
  
def show\_time():  
 now = datetime.now()  
 current\_time = now.strftime("%H:%M:%S")  
 iface.messageBar().pushMessage('Time is {}'.format(current\_time))  
   
action = QAction('Show Time')  
action.triggered.connect(show\_time)  
action.setIcon(QIcon(icon\_path))  
iface.addToolBarIcon(action)



## Projects

**QgsProject.instance()**

### Load a project

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
project = QgsProject.instance()  
project\_name = 'sf.qgz'  
project\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, project\_name)  
project.read(project\_path)



## Map Canvas

**iface.mapCanvas()**



### Set Canvas Extent to a Layer Extent

layer = iface.activeLayer()  
mc = iface.mapCanvas()  
mc.setExtent(layer.extent())  
mc.refresh()

### Save Map as an Image

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
image\_name = 'sf.png'  
image\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, image\_name)  
mc = iface.mapCanvas()  
mc.saveAsImage(image\_path)



### Save Map Rendering as an Image

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
image\_name = 'sf\_hires.png'  
image\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, image\_name)  
  
settings = iface.mapCanvas().mapSettings()  
settings.setOutputSize(QSize(1000,1000))  
  
settings.setFlag(QgsMapSettings.DrawLabeling, False)  
settings.setFlag(QgsMapSettings.Antialiasing, True)  
  
job = QgsMapRendererSequentialJob(settings)  
job.start()  
job.waitForFinished()  
image = job.renderedImage()  
image.save(image\_path)



## Layers Panel / Table of Contents (TOC)

**iface.activeLayer()**

**iface.layerTreeView()**

**iface.mapCanvas().layers()**

**QgsProject.instance().mapLayers()**

**QgsProject.instance().layerTreeRoot()**



### Change name of a Layer

layer = iface.activeLayer()  
name = layer.name()  
layer.setName('sf\_' + name)

### Get all Layers

for layer in QgsProject.instance().mapLayers().values():  
 print(layer.name())

### Get only checked (visible) Layers

for layer in iface.mapCanvas().layers():  
 print(layer.name())

### Get only selected Layers

for layer in iface.layerTreeView().selectedLayers():  
 print(layer.name())

### Get Layers with Hierarchy

def getGroupLayers(group):  
 print('- group:' + group.name())  
 for child in group.children():  
 if isinstance(child, QgsLayerTreeGroup):  
 getGroupLayers(child)  
 else:  
 print(' - layer:' + child.name())  
  
  
root = QgsProject.instance().layerTreeRoot()  
for child in root.children():  
 if isinstance(child, QgsLayerTreeGroup):  
 getGroupLayers(child)  
 elif isinstance(child, QgsLayerTreeLayer):  
 print ("- layer: " + child.name())



## Adding Data Sources

**iface.addRasterLayer()**

**iface.addVectorLayer()**

**..**

**QgsProject.instance().addMapLayer()**

**QgsProject.instance().addMapLayers()**



Data sources are identified by an URI (Uniform Resource Identifier) - For files on computer the URI is the file path - For databases, the URI is constructed using QgsDataSourceUri() class and encodes,the database path, table, username, password etc. - For web layers, such as WMF/WFS etc, the URI is the web URL

### Adding Vector Layers

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
filename = 'seismic\_zones.shp'  
uri = os.path.join(data\_dir, filename)  
iface.addVectorLayer(uri, 'seismic\_zones', 'ogr')  
  
filename = 'sf.gpkg|layername=zoning'  
uri = os.path.join(data\_dir, filename)  
iface.addVectorLayer(uri, 'zoning', 'ogr')  
  
filename = 'trees.csv'  
csvpath = 'file://' + data\_dir + filename  
uri = '{}?type=csv&xField={}&yField={}&crs={}'.format(  
 csvpath, 'Longitude', 'Latitude', 'EPSG:4326')  
iface.addVectorLayer(uri, 'trees', 'delimitedtext')



### Adding Raster Layers

iface.addRasterLayer() will not give you control on where the layer will be inserted in the layer tree. We can instead use QgsLayerTree class to insert the layer at an appropriate place.

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
filename = 'sf.gpkg:srtm'  
uri = 'GPKG:' + data\_dir + filename  
rlayer = QgsRasterLayer(uri, 'srtm', 'gdal')  
QgsProject.instance().addMapLayer(rlayer, False)  
  
rastergroup = QgsLayerTreeGroup('raster layers')  
treelayer = QgsLayerTreeLayer(rlayer)  
rastergroup.insertChildNode(0, treelayer)  
  
root = QgsProject.instance().layerTreeRoot()  
root.insertChildNode(1, rastergroup)



### Searching for a layer

blocks = QgsProject.instance().mapLayersByName('blocks')[0]

### Turning a layer on/off

QgsProject.instance().layerTreeRoot().findLayer(blocks.id()).setItemVisibilityChecked(True)

### Create a New Vector Layer

vlayer = QgsVectorLayer('Point?crs=EPSG:4326', 'point', 'memory')  
  
provider = vlayer.dataProvider()  
provider.addAttributes([QgsField('name', QVariant.String)])  
vlayer.updateFields()   
f = QgsFeature()  
f.setGeometry(QgsGeometry.fromPointXY(QgsPointXY(-122.41, 37.77)))  
f.setAttributes(['San Francisco'])  
provider.addFeature(f)  
vlayer.updateExtents()   
QgsProject.instance().addMapLayer(vlayer)

### Saving Layers to Disk

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
options = QgsVectorFileWriter.SaveVectorOptions()  
options.actionOnExistingFile = QgsVectorFileWriter.CreateOrOverwriteLayer   
options.layerName = 'point'  
  
filename = 'sf.gpkg'  
path = os.path.join(data\_dir, filename)  
QgsVectorFileWriter.writeAsVectorFormat(vlayer, path, options)

## Symbology and Labeling



### Displaying a label with a background color

vlayer = QgsProject.instance().mapLayersByName('point')[0]  
symbol = QgsMarkerSymbol.createSimple({'name': 'square', 'color': 'red'})  
vlayer.renderer().setSymbol(symbol)  
  
label\_settings = QgsPalLayerSettings()  
#label\_settings.drawBackground = True  
label\_settings.fieldName = 'name'  
  
text\_format = QgsTextFormat()  
background\_color = QgsTextBackgroundSettings()  
background\_color.setFillColor(QColor('white'))  
background\_color.setEnabled(True)  
text\_format.setBackground(background\_color )  
label\_settings.setFormat(text\_format)  
  
vlayer.setLabeling(QgsVectorLayerSimpleLabeling(label\_settings))  
vlayer.setLabelsEnabled(True)  
vlayer.triggerRepaint()



## Processing

While the PyQGIS API providers many functions to work with layers, features, attributes and geometry - it is a much better practice to use the built-in processing algorithms to alter the layers or do any analysis. This will give you better performance and result in much lesser code. Here are some examples on how to use processing algorithms from Python to do vector and raster layer editing.



### Get min/max value from a Raster Layer

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
filename = 'sf.gpkg:srtm'  
uri = 'GPKG:' + data\_dir + filename  
rlayer = QgsRasterLayer(uri, 'srtm', 'gdal')  
  
results = processing.run("qgis:rasterlayerstatistics",   
 {'INPUT': rlayer,'BAND':1})  
print('min:{},max:{}'.format(results['MIN'], results['MAX']))

### Create a hillshade from a DEM

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
filename = 'sf.gpkg:srtm'  
uri = 'GPKG:' + data\_dir + filename  
rlayer = QgsRasterLayer(uri, 'srtm', 'gdal')  
output\_name = 'hillshade.tif'  
output\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, output\_name)  
  
results = processing.runAndLoadResults("qgis:hillshade",   
 {'INPUT': rlayer,   
 'Z\_FACTOR':2,  
 'AZIMUTH':300,  
 'V\_ANGLE':40,  
 'OUTPUT': output\_path})  
print(results)



### Edit Attribute Table of a Vector Layer

When you use processing, a new layer is created by each algorithm. This example shows, how to use processing to overwrite the original layer with the results of processing.

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
filename = 'sf.gpkg|layername=blocks'  
uri = os.path.join(data\_dir, filename)  
blocks = QgsVectorLayer(uri, 'blocks', 'ogr')  
  
output = processing.run(  
 "qgis:deletecolumn",   
 {'INPUT': blocks,'COLUMN':['multigeom'],'OUTPUT':'memory:'})  
outputlayer = output['OUTPUT']  
  
final = processing.run("qgis:fieldcalculator",  
 {'INPUT':outputlayer,  
 'FIELD\_NAME':'area',  
 'FIELD\_TYPE':0,  
 'FIELD\_LENGTH':10,  
 'FIELD\_PRECISION':3,  
 'NEW\_FIELD':True,  
 'FORMULA':'$area',  
 'OUTPUT':'memory:'})  
finallayer = final['OUTPUT']  
  
options = QgsVectorFileWriter.SaveVectorOptions()  
# We overwrite the original layer  
options.layerName = 'blocks'  
options.actionOnExistingFile = QgsVectorFileWriter.CreateOrOverwriteLayer   
  
output\_file = 'sf.gpkg'  
output\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, output\_file)  
QgsVectorFileWriter.writeAsVectorFormat(finallayer, output\_path, options)  
QgsProject.instance().reloadAllLayers()

## Print Layouts



### Creating a PDF with Title

import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
project = QgsProject.instance()  
extent = QgsRectangle(-122.52, 37.71, -122.35, 37.83)  
  
layout = QgsPrintLayout(project)  
layout.initializeDefaults()  
  
pages = layout.pageCollection()  
pages.beginPageSizeChange()  
page = pages.page(0)  
page.setPageSize('A4', QgsLayoutItemPage.Landscape)  
pages.endPageSizeChange()  
page\_center = page.pageSize().width() / 2  
  
  
map = QgsLayoutItemMap(layout)  
map.setRect(QRectF(-122.52, 37.71, -122.35, 37.83))  
map.setExtent(extent)  
a4 = QPageSize().size(QPageSize.A4, QPageSize.Millimeter)  
map.attemptResize(QgsLayoutSize(a4.height(), a4.width()))  
  
layout.addItem(map)  
title = QgsLayoutItemLabel(layout)  
title.setText('San Francisco')  
title.setFont(QFont('Arial', 36))  
title.adjustSizeToText()  
title.setReferencePoint(QgsLayoutItem.UpperMiddle)  
title.attemptMove(QgsLayoutPoint(page\_center, 10))  
layout.addItem(title)  
  
output\_file = 'sf.pdf'  
output\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, output\_file)  
  
exporter = QgsLayoutExporter(layout)  
exporter.exportToPdf(  
 output\_path, QgsLayoutExporter.PdfExportSettings())



# Running Python Code at QGIS Launch

It is possible to execute some PyQGIS code every time QGIS starts. QGIS looks for a file named startup.py in the user’s Python home directory, and if it is found, executes it. This file is very useful in customizing QGIS interface with techniques learnt in the previous section.

If you are running multiple versions of QGIS, a very useful customization is to display the QGIS version number and name in the main window. The version name is stored in a global QGIS variable called qgis\_version. We can read that variable and set the main window’s title with it. We connect this code to the signal iface.initializationCompleted signal when the main window is loaded.

Create a new file named startup.py with the following code. Note the imports at the top - including iface. When we ran the code snippets in the Python Console, we did not have to import any modules since they are done automatically when the console starts. For pyqgis scripts elsewhere, we have to explicitly import the modules (classes) that we want to use.

from qgis.utils import iface  
from qgis.core import QgsExpressionContextUtils  
  
def customize():  
 version = QgsExpressionContextUtils.globalScope().variable('qgis\_version')  
 title = iface.mainWindow().windowTitle()  
 iface.mainWindow().setWindowTitle('{} | {}'.format(title,version))  
  
  
iface.initializationCompleted.connect(customize)

This file needs to be copied to the appropriate directory on your system. See [QGIS documentation](https://docs.qgis.org/testing/en/docs/pyqgis_developer_cookbook/intro.html#running-python-code-when-qgis-starts) for details on the path for your platform. For windows users, the directory will be as follows. Replace {username} with your user name.

For Windows, this directory is C:/Users/{username}/AppData/Roaming/QGIS/QGIS3



Once you copy the file at that location, restart QGIS. The title bar should now have the QGIS version name in it.



## Exercise

Trying opening a new project in QGIS after you have restarted GIS with startup.py file in place. You will notice that the custom title with the version name is replaced with the default title.

Make a change to your startup.py so that the customization is applied even when a new project is loaded.

# Writing Python Console Scripts

We will now see how can we write python scripts, save them and run them within QGIS. We will also see examples of best practices - such as validating inputs, writing files safely and communicating the status to the user.

A goal of the script is to read the features of a selected vector layer, and write its attributes to a CSV file.

Open the Python Console and click the *Show Editor* button. Copy/paste the following code. Make sure to replace the username in the file path with your username. Click the *Save* button and save the file as save\_attributes\_console.py. The file can be saved anywhere.



import os  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
output\_name = 'output.csv'  
output\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, output\_name)  
  
layer = iface.activeLayer()  
# Check if a layer is selected  
if not layer:  
 iface.messageBar().pushMessage('Please select a layer', level=Qgis.Critical)   
# Check if the selected layer is a vector layer  
if layer.type() != QgsMapLayer.VectorLayer:  
 iface.messageBar().pushMessage('Please select a vector layer', level=Qgis.Critical)  
   
# Using\*with\* statement which takes care of closing the files and handling errors  
with open(output, 'w') as output\_file:  
 fieldnames = [field.name() for field in layer.fields()]  
 ## write header  
 line = ','.join(name for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
 # write feature attributes  
 for f in layer.getFeatures():  
 line = ','.join(str(f[name]) for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
iface.messageBar().pushMessage(  
 'Success:', 'Output file written at ' + output, level=Qgis.Success)

You can run this script by clicking the *Run Script* button. The script will process the layer and write the file at the given location.



# Writing Standalone Python Scripts

Having the python script run within QGIS is useful and desired most of the time. But there is a way to write python scripts that run on your system without QGIS being open. Let’s convert the script from the previous section to a standalone pyqgis script.

Create a new file with the code below and save it as save\_attributes\_standalone.py.

import os  
from qgis.core import QgsApplication, QgsVectorLayer  
  
qgs = QgsApplication([], False)  
qgs.initQgis()  
  
data\_dir = os.path.join(os.path.expanduser('~'), 'Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/')  
  
filename = 'sf.gpkg|layername=zoning'  
uri = os.path.join(data\_dir, filename)  
layer = QgsVectorLayer(uri, 'zoning', 'ogr')  
  
output\_name = 'output.csv'  
output\_path = os.path.join(data\_dir, output\_name)  
   
with open(output\_path, 'w') as output\_file:  
 fieldnames = [field.name() for field in layer.fields()]  
 line = ','.join(name for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
 for f in layer.getFeatures():  
 line = ','.join(str(f[name]) for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
  
print('Success: ', 'Output file written at' + output\_path)  
qgs.exitQgis()

You will notice that the script is almost exactly the same, but with a few notable changes. First there is the import statement at the top, to explicitly import the required modules. Next, we create an instance of the QgsApplication class and run initQis() method to load the QGIS data providers and layer registry. Finally we call exitQgis() to remove them from memory. Here we don’t have a way to take user input, so we hard-code the path to the input layer. Also we don’t have the QGIS GUI, we have no way of displaying the messages, so we remove those statements.

When you run the script within QGIS environment, all the paths to QGIS libraries and environment variables are already set and python is able to find and use it. But when you run the script outside of QGIS, you need to set them yourself. On Windows, you can do this using a batch file. Create a new file named run\_script.bat with the following code. Make sure to save it in the same directory.

@echo off   
  
set OSGEO4W\_ROOT=C:\OSGeo4W64  
   
call "%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\bin\o4w\_env.bat"   
call "%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\bin\qt5\_env.bat"   
call "%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\bin\py3\_env.bat"   
   
set PATH=%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\bin;%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\apps\qgis-ltr\bin;%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\apps\Qt5\bin;%PATH%  
set PYTHONPATH=%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\apps\qgis-ltr\python;%PYTHONPATH%  
set QGIS\_PREFIX\_PATH=%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\apps\qgis-ltr  
set QT\_QPA\_PLATFORM\_PLUGIN\_PATH=%OSGEO4W\_ROOT%\apps\Qt5\plugins  
  
python3 save\_attributes\_standalone.py

Open the command prompt, browse to the directory with the above files, type run\_script.bat and press Enter.

You can also just double-click the run\_script.bat to run it, but you will not see any error or success messages. So it is always a good idea to run the script from the shell.

The script will run and produce the output at the given path.



# Processing Scripts

We already saw 2 different ways to write a Python script in QGIS. But there is another way - and it is the preferred approach to write scripts. Whenever you are writing a new script, consider using the built-in **Processing Framework**. This has several advantages. First, taking user input and writing output files is far easier because Processing Framework offers standardized user interface for these. Second, having your script in the Processing Toolbox also allows it to be part of any Processing Model or be run as a Batch job with multiple inputs. This tutorial will show how to write a custom python script that can be part of the Processing Framework in QGIS.

We will now see how the Python Console script can be converted to a Processing script. But first, a word on Python Classes.

## Writing a Python Class

We have sen how to use a class from PyQt or PyQGIS libraries. But we have not written a new class. To write a Processing Script, we must write a new class. A new class is defined using the word class. All classes have a function called\_\_init\_\_(), which is always executed when a new object is being created. There is also the keyword self which refers to the current instance of the class.

class Hello:  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self, greeting):  
 self.greeting = greeting  
  
 def hello(self):  
 print(self.greeting, 'World!')  
  
hi = Hello('Hi')  
hi.hello()  
hola = Hello('Hola')  
hola.hello()

As we saw, all PyQGIS and PyQt inherit from other classes. When using them, sometimes you will see the use of a function super(). Here super refers to the parent class and when you are using the child class, you need to initialize the parent class using this keyword. Let’s see this in action.

class Talk(Hello):  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self, language):  
 if language == 'English':  
 super().\_\_init\_\_('Hi')  
 elif language == 'Spanish':  
 super().\_\_init\_\_('Hola')  
 else:  
 raise ValueError('Unsupported Language')  
  
t = Talk('English')  
t.hello()  
t = Talk('Spanish')  
t.hello()

## Writing a Processing Script

To create a new processing script, go to **Processing → Processing Toolbox**. Click the *Scripts* button and select *Create New Script..*.



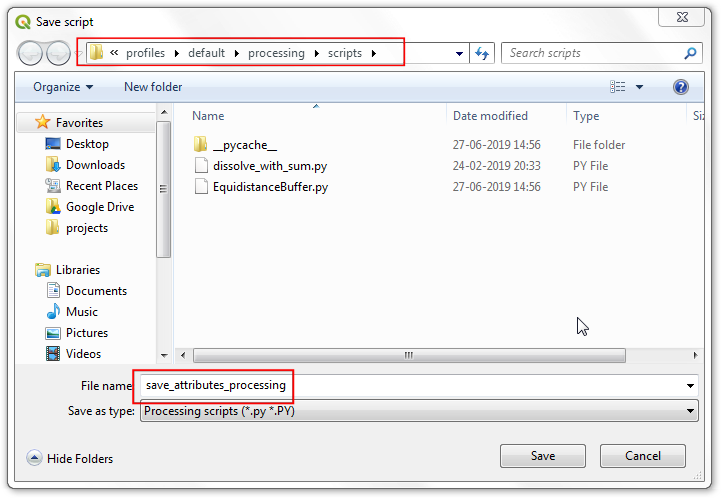
Copy/paste the following code into the *Processing Script Editor*.

from PyQt5.QtCore import QCoreApplication  
from qgis.core import (QgsProcessing,  
 QgsProcessingAlgorithm,  
 QgsProcessingParameterFeatureSource,  
 QgsProcessingParameterFileDestination)  
  
  
class SaveAttributesAlgorithm(QgsProcessingAlgorithm):  
 OUTPUT = 'OUTPUT'  
 INPUT = 'INPUT'  
  
 def initAlgorithm(self, config=None):  
 self.addParameter(  
 QgsProcessingParameterFeatureSource(  
 self.INPUT,  
 self.tr('Input layer'),  
 [QgsProcessing.TypeVectorAnyGeometry]  
 )  
 )  
  
 # We add a file output of type CSV.  
 self.addParameter(  
 QgsProcessingParameterFileDestination(  
 self.OUTPUT,  
 self.tr('Output File'),  
 'CSV files (\*.csv)',  
 )  
 )  
  
 def processAlgorithm(self, parameters, context, feedback):  
 source = self.parameterAsSource(parameters, self.INPUT, context)  
 csv = self.parameterAsFileOutput(parameters, self.OUTPUT, context)  
  
 fieldnames = [field.name() for field in source.fields()]  
  
 # Compute the number of steps to display within the progress bar and  
 # get features from source  
 total = 100.0 / source.featureCount() if source.featureCount() else 0  
 features = source.getFeatures()  
  
 with open(csv, 'w') as output\_file:  
 # write header  
 line = ','.join(name for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
 for current, f in enumerate(features):  
 # Stop the algorithm if cancel button has been clicked  
 if feedback.isCanceled():  
 break  
  
 # Add a feature in the sink  
 line = ','.join(str(f[name]) for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
  
 # Update the progress bar  
 feedback.setProgress(int(current \* total))  
  
 return {self.OUTPUT: csv}  
  
 def name(self):  
 return 'save\_attributes'  
  
 def displayName(self):  
 return self.tr('Save Attributes As CSV')  
  
 def group(self):  
 return self.tr(self.groupId())  
  
 def groupId(self):  
 return ''  
  
 def tr(self, string):  
 return QCoreApplication.translate('Processing', string)  
  
 def createInstance(self):  
 return SaveAttributesAlgorithm()



By now, you must be familiar with the code in the processAlgorithm() method. This method contains the main logic of the script that gets executed when the user clicks the *Run* button. Here we are creating a new class called SaveAttributesAlgorithm. As this is a processing script, we must inherit from the QgsProcessingAlgorithm class. The initAlgorithm() method is called to set-up the inputs and the outputs. There are other methods that set the algorithm name and group.

Click the *Save Script* button and save the script as save\_attributes\_processing.py. This script must be saved inside the {profile foler}/processing/scripts/ directory so it can be loaded when QGIS starts.



Once saved, the algorithm will appear in the *Processing Toolbox* under **Scripts → Save Attributes As CSV**. Double-click to launch it. You will see the standard processing algorithm dialog where the user can select inputs and outputs easily. Progress bar is shown correctly and the execution also stops if the user presses the *Cancel* button. If the large is large and the algorithm would take time to process it, the user can also close the window and the algorithm will continue to run in the background.



# Writing Plugins

Plugins are a great way to extend the functionality of QGIS. You can write plugins using Python that can range from adding a simple button to sophisticated tool-kits. There are 2 broad categories of python plugins - Processing Plugins and GUI Plugins. We will cover both in this section.

## A Minimal Plugin

Plugins are much more integrated into the QGIS system than Python Scripts. They are managed by **Plugin Manager** and are initialized when QGIS starts. To understand the required structure, let’s see what a minimal plugin looks like. You can learn more about this structure at [QGIS Minimalist Plugin Skeleton](https://github.com/wonder-sk/qgis-minimal-plugin).

We will be the same script for saving attributes of a vector layer and convert it to a plugin. The first requirement for plugins is a file called metadata.txt. This file contains general info, version, name and some other metadata used by plugins website and plugin manager.

metadata.txt

[general]  
name=Save Attributes  
description=This plugin saves the attributes of the selected vector layer as a CSV file  
version=1.0  
qgisMinimumVersion=3.0  
author=Ujaval Gandhi  
email=ujaval@spatialthoughts.com

Second file is called \_\_init\_\_.py which is the starting point of the plugin. It has to have the classFactory() method that returns the instance of the main plugin class.

\_\_init\_\_.py

from .save\_attributes import SaveAttributesPlugin  
  
def classFactory(iface):  
 return SaveAttributesPlugin(iface)

Third is the file that contains the main logic of the plugin. It must have \_\_init\_\_() method that gives the plugin access to the QGIS Interface (iface). The initGui() method is called when the plugin is loaded and unload() method which is called when the plugin is unloaded. For now, we are creating a minimal plugin that just add a button and a menu entry that displays message when clicked.

save\_attributes.py

import os  
import sys  
import inspect  
from PyQt5.QtWidgets import QAction  
from PyQt5.QtGui import QIcon  
  
cmd\_folder = os.path.split(inspect.getfile(inspect.currentframe()))[0]  
  
class SaveAttributesPlugin:  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self, iface):  
 self.iface = iface  
  
 def initGui(self):  
 icon = os.path.join(os.path.join(cmd\_folder, 'logo.png'))  
 self.action = QAction(QIcon(icon), 'Save Attributes as CSV', self.iface.mainWindow())  
 self.action.triggered.connect(self.run)  
 self.iface.addPluginToMenu('&Save Attributes', self.action)  
 self.iface.addToolBarIcon(self.action)  
  
 def unload(self):  
 self.iface.removeToolBarIcon(self.action)  
 self.iface.removePluginMenu('&SaveAttributes', self.action)   
 del self.action  
  
 def run(self):  
 self.iface.messageBar().pushMessage('Hello from Plugin')

Create these 3 files and put them in a folder named save\_attributes. Copy the logo.png file from <home folder>/Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/logo.png to this folder. Copy the folder to the python plugins directory at {profile folder}/python/plugins.



Restart QGIS. Go to **Plugins → Manage and Install plugins… → Installed** and enable the **Save Attributes** plugin. You will see the menu entry and the toolbar icon from the plugin.



## Processing Plugin

The new and preferred way to write plugins in QGIS is using the Processing Framework. It removes the need for you to design the user interface. The resulting plugin integrates seamlessly in the Processing Toolbox and is inoperable with other processing algorithms.

Let’s take the minimal plugin and see what is required to make it a functional processing plugin. We need 2 additional files. One to define the processing algorithm and another to define a new processing provider.

The processing algorithm file is identical to the script we wrote earlier. Create a new file called save\_attributes\_algorithm.py with the contents of the processing script from the ‘Writing a Processing Script’ section of this document.

Next, we need to define a new processing provider. Create a new file save\_attributes\_provider.py with the following content.

import os import inspect from PyQt5.QtGui import QIcon

from qgis.core import QgsProcessingProvider from .save\_attributes\_algorithm import SaveAttributesAlgorithm

class SaveAttributesProvider(QgsProcessingProvider):  
  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self):  
 QgsProcessingProvider.\_\_init\_\_(self)  
  
 def unload(self):  
 pass  
  
 def loadAlgorithms(self):  
 self.addAlgorithm(SaveAttributesAlgorithm())  
  
 def id(self):  
 return 'save\_attributes'  
  
 def name(self):  
 return self.tr('Save Attributes')  
  
 def icon(self):  
 cmd\_folder = os.path.split(inspect.getfile(inspect.currentframe()))[0]  
 icon = QIcon(os.path.join(os.path.join(cmd\_folder, 'logo.png')))  
 return icon  
  
 def longName(self):  
 return self.name()

We now make changes to the existing save\_attributes.py file to import and initialize the new processing provider. Change the contents of the file to the following

import os  
import sys  
import inspect  
from PyQt5.QtWidgets import QAction  
from PyQt5.QtGui import QIcon  
  
from qgis.core import QgsProcessingAlgorithm, QgsApplication  
import processing  
from .save\_attributes\_provider import SaveAttributesProvider  
  
  
cmd\_folder = os.path.split(inspect.getfile(inspect.currentframe()))[0]  
  
class SaveAttributesPlugin:  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self, iface):  
 self.iface = iface  
  
 def initProcessing(self):  
 self.provider = SaveAttributesProvider()  
 QgsApplication.processingRegistry().addProvider(self.provider)  
   
 def initGui(self):  
 self.initProcessing()  
 icon = os.path.join(os.path.join(cmd\_folder, 'logo.png'))  
 self.action = QAction(QIcon(icon), 'Save Attributes as CSV', self.iface.mainWindow())  
 self.action.triggered.connect(self.run)  
 self.iface.addPluginToMenu('&Save Attributes', self.action)  
 self.iface.addToolBarIcon(self.action)  
  
 def unload(self):  
 QgsApplication.processingRegistry().removeProvider(self.provider)  
 self.iface.removeToolBarIcon(self.action)  
 self.iface.removePluginMenu('&SaveAttributes', self.action)   
 del self.action  
  
 def run(self):  
 processing.execAlgorithmDialog('save\_attributes:save\_attributes')

The plugin folder should look at follows.



Now let’s reload the plugin and see what it looks like. This is a helper plugin which allows iterative development of plugins. Using this plugin, you can change your plugin code and have it reflected in QGIS without having to restart QGIS every time. Find and install the **Plugin Reloader** plugin. Once installed, go to **Plugin → Plugin Reloader → Choose a plugin to be reloaded**. Select save\_attributes in the Configure Plugin reloader dialog.



Once reloaded, you can click on the toolbar button or **Plugin → Save Attributes → Save Attributes As CSV** to launch the processing algorithm.



## GUI Plugin

There are times when the plugin needs to modify the QGIS GUI or add complex widgets. In such cases, you will have to build and program the widgets using PyQt and PyQGIS APIs. We will now see how can we design and program a dialog box to the *Minimal plugin* and convert it to a GUI plugin.

Open **Qt Designer** from C:\OSGeo4W\bin\qgis-designer.bat

Select the *Dialog with Buttons Bottom* and click *Create*.



This is a basic dialog box that we will modify later. Let’s save it for now. Name the file as save\_attributes\_dialog.ui and save it in the plugin directory {profile\_folder}\python\plugins\save\_attributes\



We need to create a new file that reads this .ui file and creates a PyQt QDialog() object from it. Create a new save\_attributes\_dialog.py in the plugin folder with the following content.

import os  
  
from PyQt5 import uic  
from PyQt5 import QtWidgets  
  
FORM\_CLASS, \_ = uic.loadUiType(os.path.join(  
 os.path.dirname(\_\_file\_\_), 'save\_attributes\_dialog.ui'))  
  
  
class SaveAttributesDialog(QtWidgets.QDialog, FORM\_CLASS):  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self, parent=None):  
 super(SaveAttributesDialog, self).\_\_init\_\_(parent)  
 self.setupUi(self)

Now we can import this into the main plugin file save\_attributes.py and initialize the dialog. Replace the content of the file with the following.

import os  
import sys  
import inspect  
from PyQt5.QtWidgets import QAction  
from PyQt5.QtGui import QIcon  
from .save\_attributes\_dialog import SaveAttributesDialog  
  
cmd\_folder = os.path.split(inspect.getfile(inspect.currentframe()))[0]  
  
class SaveAttributesPlugin:  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self, iface):  
 self.iface = iface  
  
 def initGui(self):  
 icon = os.path.join(os.path.join(cmd\_folder, 'logo.png'))  
 self.action = QAction(QIcon(icon), 'Save Attributes as CSV', self.iface.mainWindow())  
 self.action.triggered.connect(self.run)  
 self.iface.addPluginToMenu('&Save Attributes', self.action)  
 self.iface.addToolBarIcon(self.action)  
 self.first\_start = True  
  
  
 def unload(self):  
 self.iface.removeToolBarIcon(self.action)  
 self.iface.removePluginMenu('&Save Attributes', self.action)   
 del self.action  
  
 def run(self):  
 if self.first\_start == True:  
 self.first\_start = False  
 self.dlg = SaveAttributesDialog()  
   
 self.dlg.show()

Back in QGIS, reload the plugin. Click the *Save Attributes As CSV* toolbar button. You will see the UI dialog appear.



Now we can go back to Qt Designer and complete the UI design. You can drag various elements like *label*, *Combo Box*, *Line Edit* and *Push Button* as shown below. Once complete, save the dialog. Note the name of the object names of various widgets. We will use these names to program these elements.



The main file save\_attributes.py needs to be changed. Most importantly we need to add a new select\_output\_file() method and connect it to the *…* button. Rest of the code should be familiar from the previous sections.

import os  
import sys  
import inspect  
from PyQt5.QtGui import QIcon  
from PyQt5.QtWidgets import QAction, QFileDialog  
from qgis.core import QgsProject, Qgis, QgsMapLayer  
from .save\_attributes\_dialog import SaveAttributesDialog  
  
cmd\_folder = os.path.split(inspect.getfile(inspect.currentframe()))[0]  
  
class SaveAttributesPlugin:  
 def \_\_init\_\_(self, iface):  
 self.iface = iface  
  
 def initGui(self):  
 icon = os.path.join(os.path.join(cmd\_folder, 'logo.png'))  
 self.action = QAction(QIcon(icon), 'Save Attributes as CSV', self.iface.mainWindow())  
 self.action.triggered.connect(self.run)  
 self.iface.addPluginToMenu('&Save Attributes', self.action)  
 self.iface.addToolBarIcon(self.action)  
 self.first\_start = True  
  
  
 def unload(self):  
 self.iface.removeToolBarIcon(self.action)  
 self.iface.removePluginMenu('&Save Attributes', self.action)   
 del self.action  
  
 def select\_output\_file(self):  
 filename, \_filter = QFileDialog.getSaveFileName(  
 self.dlg, "Select output file ","", '\*.csv')  
 self.dlg.lineEdit.setText(filename)  
   
 def run(self):  
 if self.first\_start == True:  
 self.first\_start = False  
 self.dlg = SaveAttributesDialog()  
 self.dlg.pushButton.clicked.connect(self.select\_output\_file)  
  
   
 layers = QgsProject.instance().mapLayers().values()  
 vectorlayers = [layer for layer in layers if layer.type() == QgsMapLayer.VectorLayer]  
 self.dlg.comboBox.clear()  
 self.dlg.lineEdit.clear()  
 self.dlg.comboBox.addItems([layer.name() for layer in vectorlayers])  
 self.dlg.show()  
 # Run the dialog event loop  
 result = self.dlg.exec\_()  
 # See if OK was pressed  
 if result:  
 filename = self.dlg.lineEdit.text()  
 with open(filename, 'w') as output\_file:  
 selectedLayerName = self.dlg.comboBox.currentText()  
 selectedLayer = QgsProject.instance().mapLayersByName(selectedLayerName)[0]  
 fieldnames = [field.name() for field in selectedLayer.fields()]  
 # write header  
 line = ','.join(name for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
 # wirte feature attributes  
 for f in selectedLayer.getFeatures():  
 line = ','.join(str(f[name]) for name in fieldnames) + '\n'  
 output\_file.write(line)  
 self.iface.messageBar().pushMessage(  
 'Success', 'Output file written at ' + filename, level=Qgis.Success)

Reload and you will see the fully functioning plugin.



# Writing Python Expression Functions

Expressions in QGIS have a lot of power and are used in many core features: selection, calculating field values, styling, labeling etc. QGIS also has support for user-defined expressions. With a little bit of python programming, you can define your own functions that can be used within the expression engine.

Custom python functions in QGIS use **decorators** to make the function available across the system. Let’s understand how decorators work.

## Understanding Python Decorators

Decorators are functions that take a function as an input and returns a modified function. Decorators are an easy way to inject additional functionality into existing functions without a lot of repeated code. To decorate a function, you use the @decorator syntax above the function definition.

def fancify(normal\_function):  
   
 def fancy(\*args, \*\*kwargs):  
 val = normal\_function(\*args, \*\*kwargs)  
 return val.replace('Hello', 'Hellooo!!!')  
   
 return fancy  
   
def hello(name):  
 return 'Hello ' + name  
   
print(hello('World'))  
  
@fancify  
def hello(name):  
 return 'Hello ' + name  
   
print(hello('World'))

## Custom function to find UTM Zone of a feature

We will define a custom function that finds the UTM zone number of a map feature. Open the project places.qgz from <home folder>/Downloads/pyqgis\_in\_a\_day/places.qgz

Click the *Select features using an expression button* on the Attributes Toolbar.

 In the Select by Expression dialog, switch to the Function Editor tab. Here you can write any PyQGIS code that will be executed by the expression engine. We will define a new function called GetUtmZone(). Note the use of @qgsfunction decorator which registers this function with the expression engine. Enter the following code.

import math  
from qgis.core import \*  
from qgis.gui import \*  
  
@qgsfunction(args=0, group='Custom', usesgeometry=True)  
def GetUtmZone(value1, feature, parent):  
 """Return the UTM Zone of the feature's geometry as a String"""  
 centroid = feature.geometry()  
 longitude = centroid.asPoint().x()  
 latitude = centroid.asPoint().y()  
 zone\_number = math.floor(((longitude + 180) / 6) % 60) + 1  
  
 if latitude >= 0:  
 zone\_letter = 'N'  
 else:  
 zone\_letter = 'S'  
  
 return '%d%s' % (int(zone\_number), zone\_letter)



Switch to the *Expression* tab in the Select by expression dialog. Find and expand the *Custom* group in the Functions section. You will notice a new custom function GetUtmZone in the list. We can now use this function in the expressions just like any other function. Type the following expression in the editor and click *Select*.

GetUtmZone() == '44N'



Back in the main QGIS window, you should see some points highlighted in yellow. These are the points falling in the UTM Zone we specified in the expression. 

You can also use the expression in the field calculator. Open the field calculator and add a new virtual field called utmzone with the following expression

GetUtmZone()



You will see the attribute table updates with the corresponding utm zone for each feature.



## Exercise

Write a new custom function called unique\_values() that takes the a comma-separated string value and removes duplicate values.

For example,

'cat,mouse,dog,mouse' --> 'cat,mouse,dog'

Test this function by reading values from the allnames column and creating a new column uniquenames.

Below is the template to get started.

from qgis.core import \*  
from qgis.gui import \*  
  
@qgsfunction(args='auto', group='Custom')  
def unique\_values(value, feature, parent):  
 # Write your code here

# Resources for Further Learning

* Official QGIS Documentation - [PyQGIS Developer Cookbook](https://docs.qgis.org/testing/en/docs/pyqgis_developer_cookbook/)
* [PyQGIS 101: Introduction to QGIS Python programming for non-programmers](https://anitagraser.com/pyqgis-101-introduction-to-qgis-python-programming-for-non-programmers/) by Anita Graser
* [PyQGIS Samples](https://webgeodatavore.github.io/pyqgis-samples/) by Thomas Gratier
* [QGIS Python tests](https://github.com/qgis/QGIS/tree/adc25ec8f775036fe16c888eb369eb196b64aee8/tests/src/python)

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1. See <https://qgis.org/api/3.4/classQgsProject.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-34)