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Introduction to Python Testing

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Course Outline

- Testing
  - What is automated testing
  - Benefits of a good test suite
  - Different types of tests
- Hands on with pytest
  - Install and run pytest
  - Write simple tests
  - Use temporary files in tests
  - Use fixtures to manage resources
  - Parametrize tests
  - Write tests in a Jupyter notebook
- Best practices
  - How to write good tests

Testing

What is testing anyway?

There are many ways in which all software is tested:

- It is “tested” every time it is used and produces some output
- It was probably manually tested with some sample inputs when written
- There is probably some manual testing when changes are made

However this kind of “testing” can quickly become both insufficient and inefficient as a software project grows in complexity.

Changing the code risks breaking things that previously worked without notice, and manually testing all the functionality quickly becomes an impossible task

Automated tests

Many software projects also have automated tests

- A test is a piece of code that tests some behaviour of the software
- A test suite is a collection of such tests
- The test suite typically runs automatically whenever a change is made
- The more complex the project, the more value a good test suite provides
- But a test suite is not only for large projects!

This is the kind of testing we will learn about in this course.

Types of tests

- Unit tests
- Integration tests
- System tests
- Regression tests
- Approval tests
- Acceptance tests
- Smoke tests
- Performance tests
- Fuzzing tests
- Property based tests
- ...

Types of tests

- **Unit tests**
- **Integration tests**
  - System tests
  - Regression tests
  - Approval tests
  - Acceptance tests
  - Smoke tests
  - Performance tests
  - Fuzzing tests
  - Property based tests
  - ...

Unit tests

- Small, self-contained tests of a piece of functionality
- Narrow scope: eg. a single function or class
- Fast to run
- Don’t depend on any other components
  - Dependencies sometimes replaced with mocks or doubles
- Typically most (e.g. 80%) of your tests should be unit tests
- Primary way of testing correctness
- Should be written alongside the functionality being tested
- Failing unit test directly tells you what has gone wrong

Integration / System tests

- Also known as “end-to-end” or “functional” tests
- Tests involving multiple interacting components
- Should be a smaller fraction (e.g. 20%) of your test suite
- Compared to unit tests
  - Typically take longer to run
  - Typically more risks of being brittle or flaky
  - Typically need more maintenance
- If most tests end up as integration tests, consider making code more modular

There are other kinds of tests, but a great test suite can be built from only unit and integration tests.

A good test suite provides many benefits

- Ensure **correctness** of your code when you write it
- **Maintain** correctness of your code as things change around it
- Make changes or **refactor** code without fear
- Find bugs **earlier** and more easily
- Easier for new contributors to make **positive** changes
- Complements the **documentation** as examples of use
- Gives others **confidence** in the correctness of your code
- Encourages **well-designed** modular code and interfaces

The pytest library

- You don’t need to use a library to write a test suite
- But it makes your life much easier

In this course we’ll use pytest to help us create our tests

- pytest is a very widely used Python test framework
- Makes it easy to write small and readable tests
- Also offers more advanced features such as fixtures and mocks
- Large ecosystem of plugins providing additional functionality
- Well documented: docs.pytest.org

Hands on with pytest

Hands on coding

- For each topic we'll look at a couple of introductory slides
- Then we'll write some code and tests together
- You can see all the code as I write it here:

  https://github.com/ssciwr/python-testing-intro-live

- You will need
  - A Python environment where you can install packages
    - Recommended: conda or anaconda
    - https://www.anaconda.com/download
  - A text editor to write your code and tests
    - Recommended: PyCharm Community Edition
    - https://www.jetbrains.com/pycharm/download

Conda environment

- First we'll create a new conda environment
  - Environment name is "testing"
  - The only thing installed in it is Python

```
conda create -n testing python
```

- Then we'll activate this environment

```
conda activate testing
```

- Now we can install pytest into our environment:

```
conda install pytest
```

Pytest use in one slide

1. For every file `x.py`, add a file `test_x.py`
2. In this file, write functions with names that start with `test_`
3. Inside these functions, `assert` things about the code in `x.py`
4. Run pytest: `python -m pytest`
5. You now have an automated test suite!

Coding #1

- Write a function that calculates the area of a square
- Write some tests for it
- Run the tests
- Experiment with tests that fail, tests that pass
- What happens if we add a test for a square with length 0.2?

Pytest float equality

- Testing if two Integers are the same is easy:
  - assert a == b
- Floats are less trivial, because on a computer they have finite precision
  - Best to assert that they are approximately equal
  - But should we use the relative or absolute difference?
  - And how close should they be?
- Use the `approx` function for a sensible floating point equality test

```
def test_floats_equal():
    assert 0.999999999999 == pytest.approx(1.0)
```

Coding #2

- Use pytest.approx to write robust tests for floats
- What happens if we pass a negative number for the length?
- What should happen?
- Update our function to raise a ValueError exception for negative inputs
- How can we test this?

Pytest exceptions

- How do we assert that code should raise an exception?
- Use the `pytest.raises` context manager

```
import pytest

def test_exception():
    my_list = [1, 2, 3]
    with pytest.raises(IndexError):
        my_list[5]
```

Coding #3

- Use `pytest.raises` to test negative inputs
- Should we check for Exception or ValueError?
- Can we check what the error message was as well as the exception type?
- Can we do multiple exception-causing things inside pytest.raises?
- What happens if we pass a string or a list instead of a number for length?

Pytest parameterize tests

- How do we repeat a test with different inputs?
- Use the `@pytest.mark.parameterize` decorator

```
@pytest.mark.parametrize("length", [-2, -5.6677])
def test_area_of_square_invalid_value(length):
    with pytest.raises(ValueError):
        area_of_square(length)
```

Coding #4

- Use `pytest.mark.parameterize` to repeat a test for different inputs
- Rewrite our existing tests using this feature
- Extend our code to also deal with rectangles (i.e. width and length inputs)
- Write a rectangle test that is parametrized over both of these inputs
- Refactor our area_of_square code to call area_of_rectangle

Pytest command line arguments

- -s
  - Show console output from code
- -v
  - Verbose: list all tests that are ran
- -x
  - Stop early if a test fails
- -k
  - Only run matching tests
- -h
  - Display information about command line arguments

Coding #5

- Use command line arguments to control pytest
- Select particular tests to run or to exclude
- Stop the tests when one test fails
- Display more information about the tests
- Display any console output from the code

Pytest temporary files

- How do we create a temporary folder for a test?
- Use the `tmp_path` fixture

```
def test_write(tmp_path):
    print(tmp_path)
    assert str(tmp_path) != ""
```

Coding #6

- Create a function that counts the number of lines in a text file
- Write a test for this function using tmp_path to make a temporary input file

Pytest fixtures

- How do we inherit or reuse context, data and mocks?
- Create and use `fixtures`
- Fixtures can themselves use other fixtures

```
@pytest.fixture()
def colors():
    return [“red”, “green”, “blue”]

def test_colors(colors):
    assert colors[0] == “red”
    assert len(colors) == 3
```

Coding #7

- Create a pytest.fixture that returns a temporary file
- Refactor the test to use this fixture
- Add a function to count the characters in the file
- Use this fixture to write a test for the new function

Pytest mocking

- How do we mock an attribute or environment variable?
- Use the `monkeypatch` fixture

```
def test_message_box(monkeypatch: MonkeyPatch):

    def do_nothing(*args, **kwargs):
        return

    monkeypatch.setattr(QMessageBox, "information", do_nothing)
    QMessageBox.information(None, "title", "text")
```

Coding #8

- Write a function that returns the number of bytes of a download url
- Use the requests library to download the file
- Write a test of this function
- To be robust we don’t want the test to actually download a file
- We can monkeypatch requests to instead return a test file

Jupyter notebook

- What about code in jupyter notebooks?
- The ipytest package lets us run pytest tests inside the notebook:
  - `import ipytest`
  - `ipytest.autoconfig()`
- Write your pytest test case inside a notebook cell
- Add this command to the first line of the cell:
  - `%%ipytest`
- Executing the cell will run pytest & display the output below the cell

A big advantage of this over just manually running code in a cell to test things is that if you later transfer this code into a python module or package you can also transfer the tests.

Conda environment

- Ensure that jupyter lab and ipytest are installed

```
conda install jupyterlab ipytest
```

- If you use anaconda and ipytest is not found, try the conda-forge channel:

```
conda install ipytest -c conda-forge
```

- Or alternatively install it using pip

```
pip install ipytest
```

Coding #9

- Create a jupyter notebook
- Import and initialize ipytest
- Write and run a test function
- Use this fixture to write a test for the new function

Pytest fixture factories

- How do we make a fixture that can take arguments?
- Use a `fixture factory`

```
@pytest.fixture
def named_tmp_file(tmp_path):
    def _callable(name):
        return tmp_path / name
    return _callable

def test_tmp_file(named_tmp_file):
    tmp_file = named_tmp_file("tempy.temp")
    assert tmp_file.name == "tempy.temp"
```

Coding #10

- Create a pytest.fixture that returns a temporary file with n lines
- One way to do this is using a fixture factory
- The fixture doesn’t return the temp file, but instead it returns a function
- Inside the test that function can be called to generate the file

Best Practices

Good tests are...

- Correct
  - They test that the thing they are testing is working
- Readable
  - It is obvious from looking at it what the test does
- Complete
  - They covers all relevant cases and behaviours
- Documentation
  - They demonstrate how the code being tested should be used
- Resilient
  - They only fail when the thing being tested is false, not for any other reason
- Unchanging
  - They don’t need to be modified unless the behaviour being tested changes

Mostly write unit tests

GUI / manual tests

Compared to integration tests:

- Slower
- More brittle
- Less precise

Integration tests

Compared to unit tests:

- Slower
- More brittle
- Less precise

Unit tests

The core of your test suite

- Fast
- Robust
- Precise

Keep test code simple

- Test code should be “obvious upon inspection”
- Should be complete: contain enough information to understand the test
- Should be concise: don’t include irrelevant information
- Avoid “clever” code, complex control flow, magic numbers, etc
- Some code repetition between tests is ok if it makes test code simpler

Why?

- There are no tests for your tests!
- When a test fails, reading the test code should tell you what is wrong

Name tests well

- Test names should include the behaviour being tested
- Seeing the failing test name should already give a good idea what is broken
- It is fine if this makes the test name long
  - We're not ***calling*** this function in our code, it being long doesn't matter
  - We're ***reading*** its name in a failing test report, a human should understand its intent
- Some examples: bad short name -> better longer name
  - `test0 -> test_divide_by_zero_raises_exception`
  - `test_auth -> test_invalid_user_should_deny_access`
  - `test_widget -> test_mouse_click_on_widget_changes_colour`
- Consider a sentence involving "should" as a starting point for the name
- Try to ensure consistency in test naming

Don’t test unrelated things

- Don’t assert things unrelated to the thing you are testing
- Avoid assumptions about the internal structure of the code

Why?

- Avoid the test becoming brittle / noisy
  - Unrelated changes should not cause the test to fail
- Make the test more maintainable
  - Unrelated changes should not require the test to be updated
- Make the meaning of the test clear
  - Test failure should tell you what broke and what needs to be fixed

Summary

Summary

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- Best practices
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Next steps

- Try adding some tests to your code
  - If in doubt the pytest documentation is excellent:
    - https://docs.pytest.org/
- For your next Python project
  - Try our basic template for Python research software development:
    - https://github.com/ssciwr/python-project-template
- For your next Python package
  - Try our cookiecutter to generate a Python package with pytest tests, CI, coverage, etc:
    - github.com/ssciwr/cookiecutter-python-package
- SSC compact course “Effective Software Testing”
    - https://ssciwr.github.io/effective-software-testing