



Welcome to the Beautiful World of Scientific Computing

Anthony Scopatz

Inspired by Greg Wilson, Software Carpentry and
Paul Wilson, The University of Wisconsin-Madison

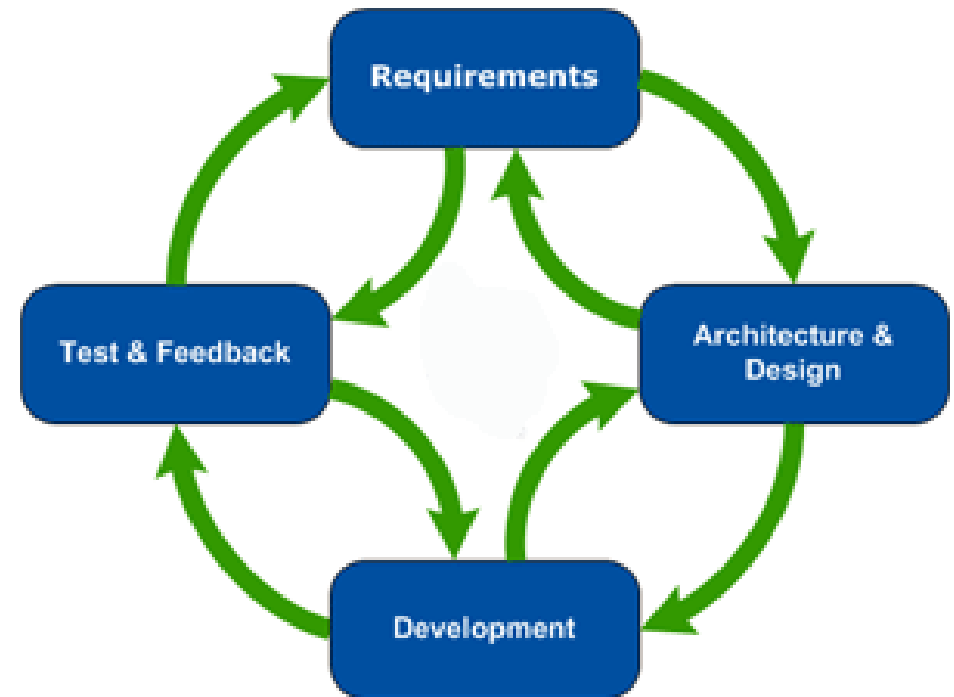
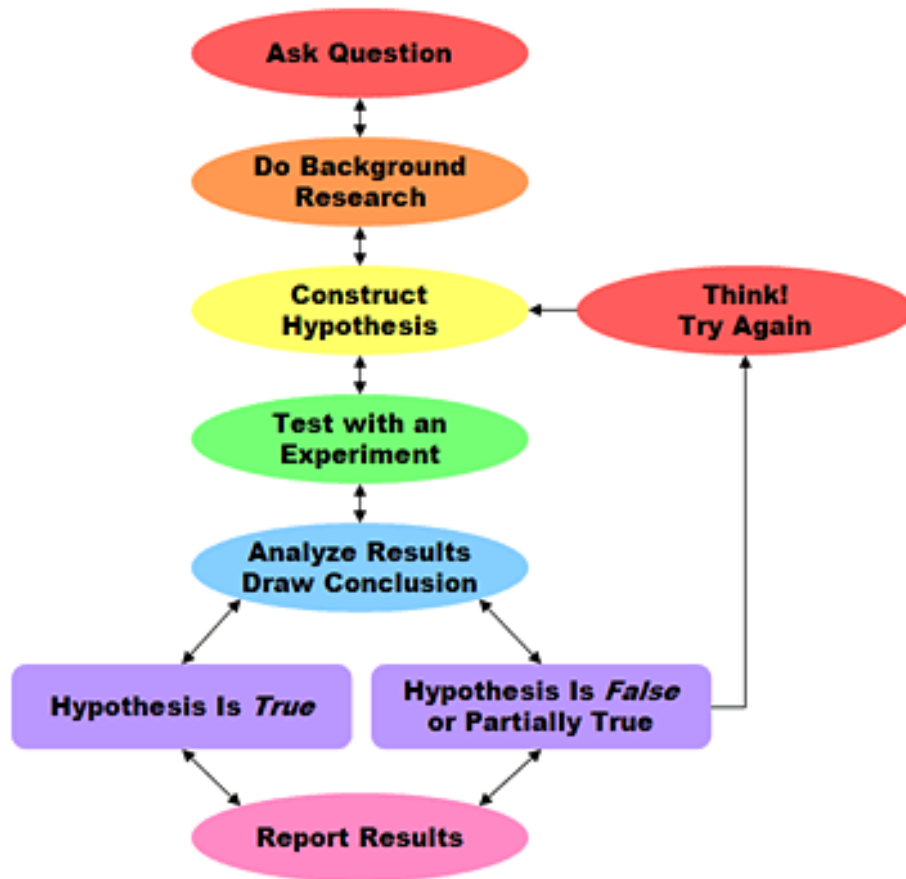
Pre-Assessment Survey

Please Fill Out the Following Questionnaire,
<http://bit.ly/aims-pre-2014>

Aside: Course Structure

- This course will be interactive.
- There will be many exercises.
- Feel free to type along and explore as we go.
- Never hesitate to ask questions.
- Collaborate with your friends
- The first 10 – 30 minutes are review
 - Come with questions!

Science & Computing



Three 'Blessed' Language Families of Scientific Computing

- Fortran
- C/C++
- Python

We'll be focusing on Python.

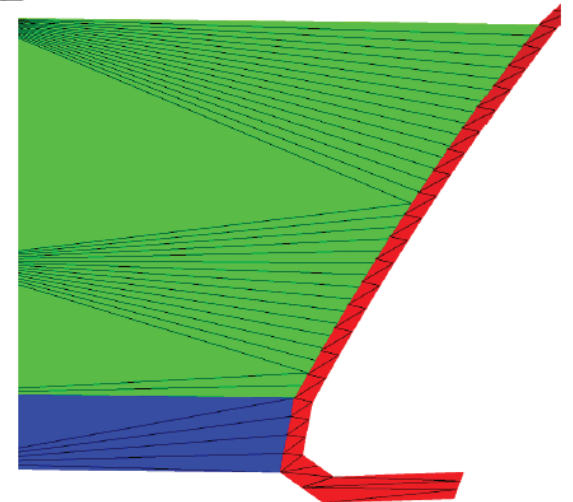
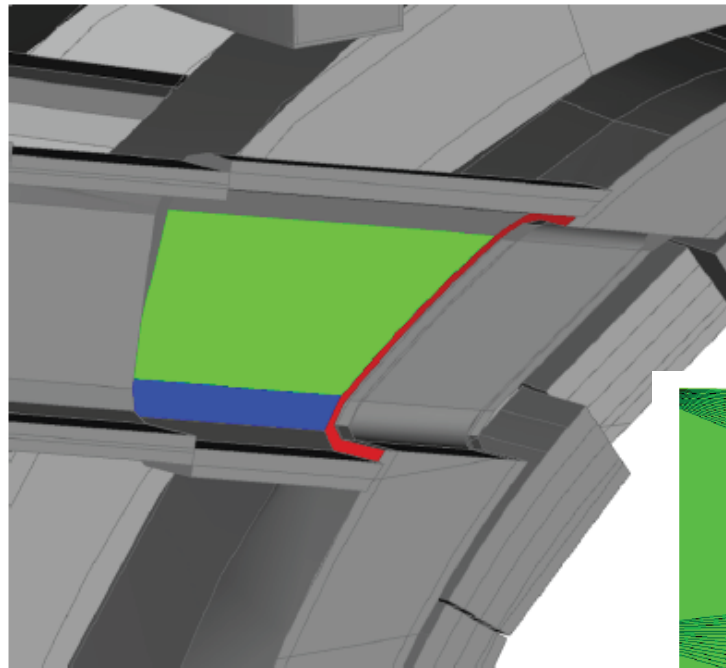
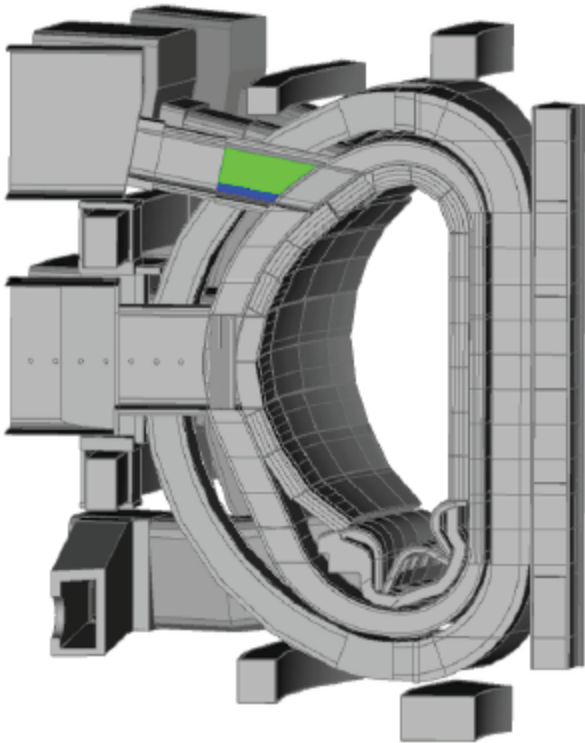
Reality of Research Computing

- Many scientists spend most of their time developing, maintaining, or running software
 - Most don't consider themselves software engineers
 - Few have ever been taught how
 - Learned on-the-job
 - Tribal knowledge

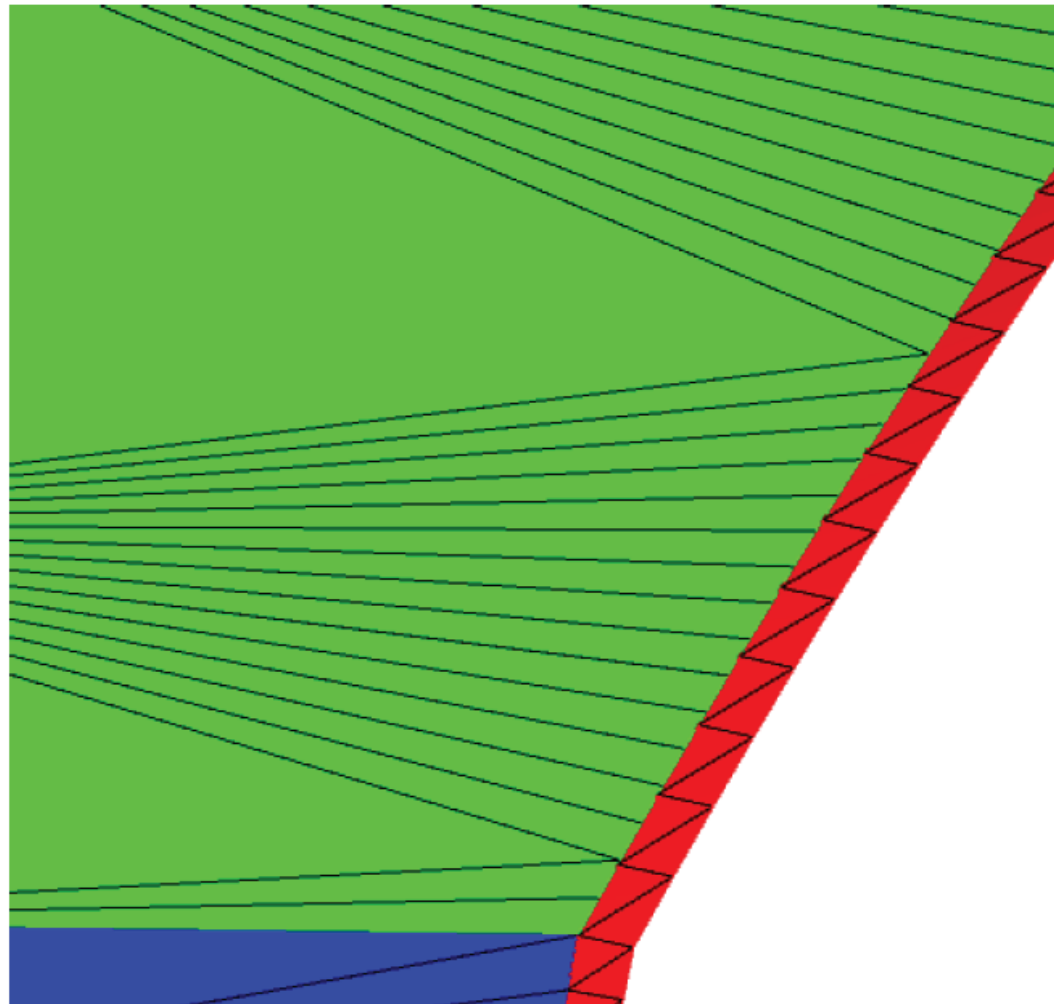
So What...

- Most results take longer to produce than they need to
 - Not because of a lack of computers
- Difficult to assess quality
 - Often measured by reproducibility
 - “System” doesn’t care

A Recent Story: Sealing a Faceted Geometry

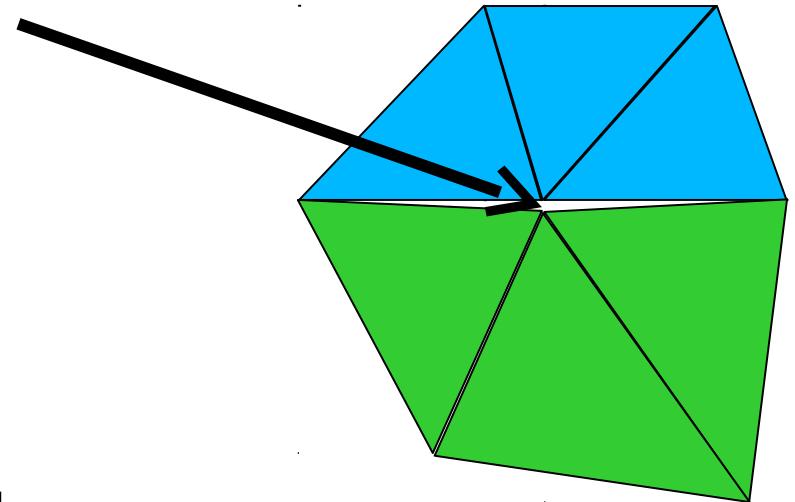


A Recent Story: Sealing a Faceted Geometry



A Recent Story: Sealing a Faceted Geometry

- Lost particles through “leaks”
- Reduce confidence in solution



A Recent Story: Sealing a Faceted Geometry

Model	Particles Simulated [millions]	Lost Particles	
		Original	Robust
UW Nuclear Reactor	41	5649 ± 178	0
Advanced Test Reactor	74	141 ± 32	0
40° ITER Benchmark	225	67 ± 39	0
ITER TBM	205	665 ± 184	0
ITER Module 4	59	59 ± 19	0
ITER Module 13	79	450 ± 60	0
FNG Benchmark	1310	31273 ± 989	0
ARIES First Wall	4070	25 ± 18	0
HAPL IFE	286	65 ± 19	0
Z-Pinch Fusion	409	2454 ± 317	0

AIMS to the Rescue

- Best practices used by the best software engineers whose business is development of quality software
 - They don't always have formal training
 - They don't always follow all the best practices
 - Growing evidence supported by empirical studies

Write Programs for People, Not Computers

- Most researchers will spend more time reading code than writing code
 - It's the primary way to learn what it does and how
- Recognize realities of human cognition
 - Working memory is limited
 - Pattern matching abilities are finely tuned
 - Attention span is short

Automate Repetitive Tasks

- This is why we invented computers!!
 - It's not why we invented graduate students
- Saves time & avoids errors
- Can track dependencies
- Unambiguous record of workflow
- Motivates command-line interfaces

Use the Computer to Record History

- Careful record keeping is fundamental to science
- A manual log book works for experiments occurring at a “traditional” pace
- What happens when you can perform 100 experiments/day? 1000? 10,000?

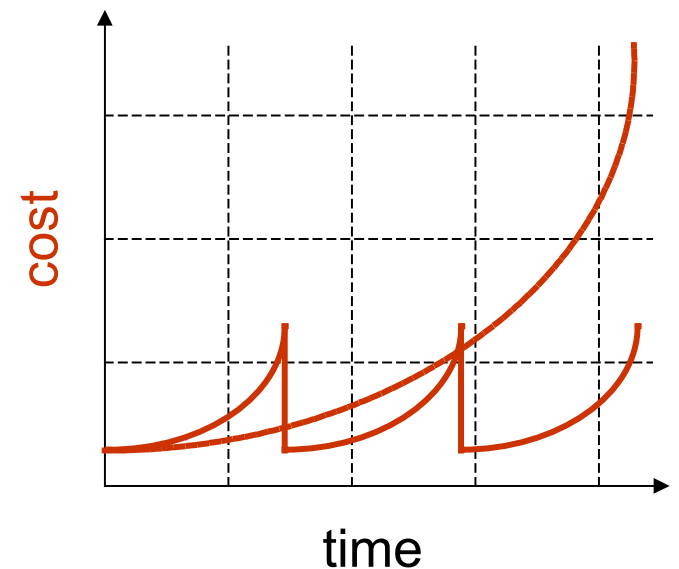
Use the Computer to Record History

- Use software tools to track computational work
 - Unique identifiers/versions for data
 - Unique identifiers/versions for software
 - All input parameters
- Embed this information in output



Make Incremental Changes

- Long development cycles have many disadvantages
 - Human attention span
 - Delayed identification of bugs
 - Adapt to changes in requirements
- “Agile” development



Use Version Control

- Two big challenges
 - Tracking all the changes to code over time
 - Synchronizing changes during collaboration
- Bleeds back to provenance
 - How do you know exactly which version you used?

Use Version Control

- Ad-hoc solutions:
 - Make separate copies for different versions
 - Dropbox, email for sharing
- All subject to human error
- Why not “Use the Computer to Record [this] History”, too?

Use Version Control

- A great big “undo” button
- Focus on changes

Don't Repeat Yourself (or Others)

- Anything repeated in 2 or more places is difficult to maintain
 - Increases chance of errors and inconsistencies
- Modularize the code you write
- Don't reinvent the wheel

Plan for Mistakes

- Bugs are guaranteed!
- Finding bugs is hard!
- No single practice will catch all defects – use in combination
 - Defensive programming
 - Testing
 - Debuggers

Optimize Software Only After it Works Correctly

- Correct is more important than fast
- Complexity of modern hardware & software make it difficult to predict bottlenecks
- Profile and test performance after it works to identify need for improvement

Optimize Software Only After it Works Correctly

- Corollary: Use high level languages!
- Fixed: number of lines of code per day, independent of the language
- Get more done with high-level languages, even if slower
- Profile, measure and improve

Document the Design and Purpose of Code Rather than its Mechanics

- Most research software will be handed off at least once
 - Large cost for “forensic” analysis
- Documentation is critical
 - ... but only if it’s good documentation

Document the Design and Purpose of Code Rather than its Mechanics

- Document interfaces
 - How to use something
 - What behavior to expect & why
- Do not document implementation
 - Well-written implementation should be self explanatory
 - If not, refactor it until it is
 - May need to document reasons for specific implementation decision

Conduct Code Reviews

- Peer review is a cornerstone of modern research
 - Reduces errors
 - Improves communication/understandability
- Why review publications based on software and not the software itself?

A Recent Story: Sealing a Faceted Geometry

- Why did this disruption happen?
 - Inadequate testing
 - Inadequate reporting of version numbers
 - Lack of automation

Limited Time, Many Practices

- Automation (requires Shell)
- Writing Code for People
- Don't Repeat Yourself (or Others)
- Version Control
- Testing
- Collaboration

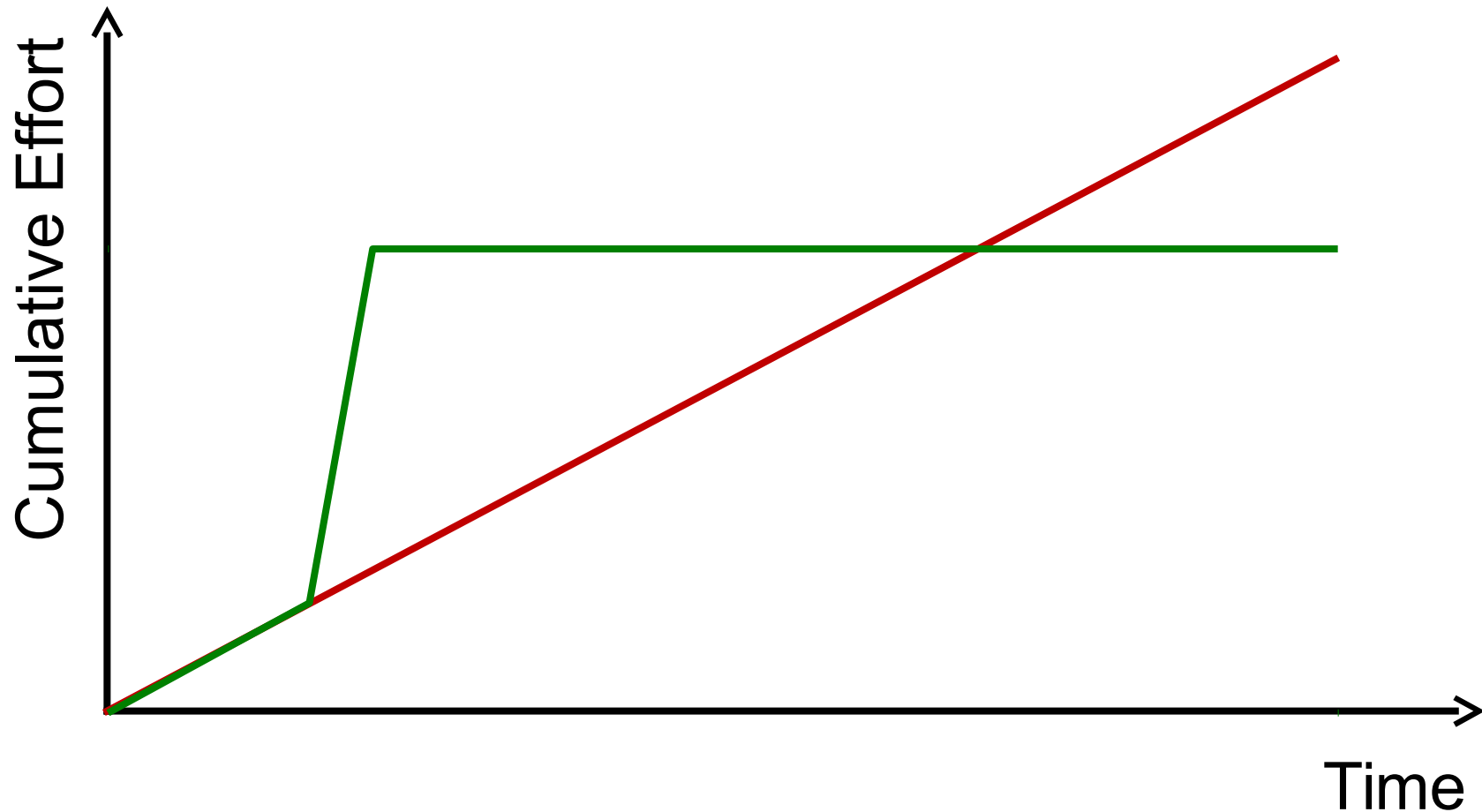
Make Incremental Changes Redux

- This applies to HOW you work
- Choose one practice
 - Implement it in your work
 - Share it with your group
 - Allow it to sink in
- Repeat

How to Choose Where to Start?

- It will depend on the nature of your work
- Consider the purpose:
 - Improve productivity
 - Improve quality

Thoughts on Productivity and Automation



Thoughts on Productivity and Automation

HOW LONG CAN YOU WORK ON MAKING A ROUTINE TASK MORE
EFFICIENT BEFORE YOU'RE SPENDING MORE TIME THAN YOU SAVE?
(ACROSS FIVE YEARS)

		HOW OFTEN YOU DO THE TASK					
		50/DAY	5/DAY	DAILY	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	YEARLY
HOW MUCH TIME YOU SHAVE OFF	1 SECOND	1 DAY	2 HOURS	30 MINUTES	4 MINUTES	1 MINUTE	5 SECONDS
	5 SECONDS	5 DAYS	12 HOURS	2 HOURS	21 MINUTES	5 MINUTES	25 SECONDS
	30 SECONDS	4 WEEKS	3 DAYS	12 HOURS	2 HOURS	30 MINUTES	2 MINUTES
	1 MINUTE	8 WEEKS	6 DAYS	1 DAY	4 HOURS	1 HOUR	5 MINUTES
	5 MINUTES	9 MONTHS	4 WEEKS	6 DAYS	21 HOURS	5 HOURS	25 MINUTES
	30 MINUTES		6 MONTHS	5 WEEKS	5 DAYS	1 DAY	2 HOURS
	1 HOUR		10 MONTHS	2 MONTHS	10 DAYS	2 DAYS	5 HOURS
	6 HOURS				2 MONTHS	2 WEEKS	1 DAY
	1 DAY					8 WEEKS	5 DAYS

Verify Environment

Please make sure that you can do the following
on your computers...

```
$ git clone https://scopatz@bitbucket.org/scopatz/aims-scicomp.git  
$ cd aims-scicomp  
$ ipython notebook
```

How to Find Me

Office 106

scopatz@gmail.com

'scopatz' is my username everywhere

Phone: 27 763 431 932