

Introduction to Regular expressions

Regular expressions are basically a tiny language all their own that you can use inside of Python and many other programming languages. You will often hear regular expressions referred to as “regex”, “regexp” or just “RE”. Some languages, such as Perl and Ruby, actually support regular expression syntax directly in the language itself. Python only supports them via a library that you need to import. The primary use for regular expressions is matching strings. You create the string matching rules using a regular expression and then you apply it to a string to see if there are any matches.

The regular expression “language” is actually pretty small, so you won’t be able to use it for all your string matching needs. Besides that, while there are some tasks that you can use a regular expression for, it may end up so complicated that it becomes difficult to debug. In cases like that, you should just use Python. It should be noted that Python is an excellent language for text parsing in its own right and can be used for anything you do in a regular expression. However, it may take a lot more code to do so and be slower than the regular expression because regular expressions are compiled down and executed in C.