

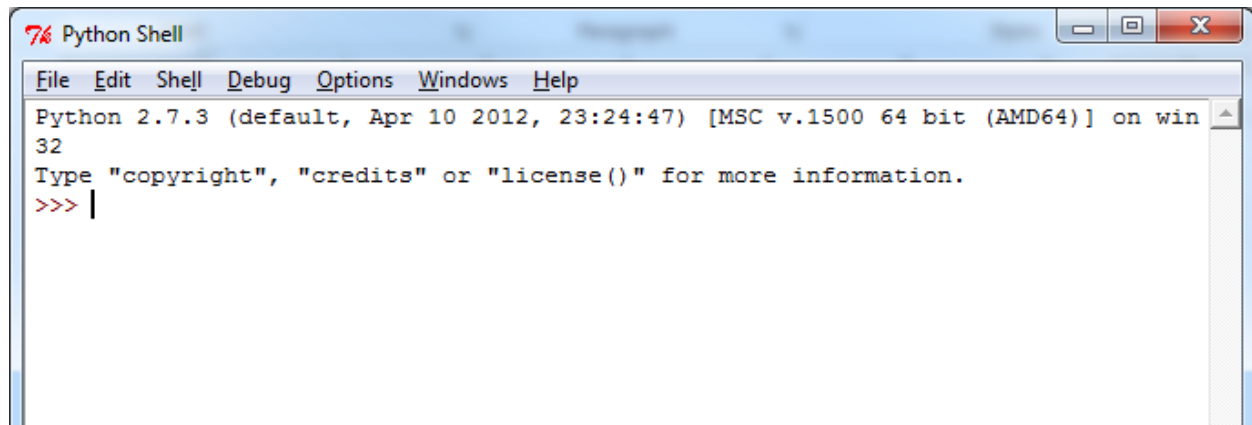
# Introduction to Python

COMP 089H Fall 2015

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## IDLE

IDLE is a simple interactive Python development environment. It consists of a Python shell, which evaluates what you type and displays the output, and an editor window to create Python code files (more on that later).



When IDLE first opens, it will tell you which version of Python it is running. You type your commands after the “>>>” prompt.

### Keyword: print

The canonical programming example is to write a program that outputs “Hello, world!”. In Python, this is very easy:

```
>>> print "Hello, world!"  
Hello, world!
```

In this example, we introduce a few important concepts.

### Syntax Highlighting: keywords, strings, shell output

First, note that IDLE colors the different parts of this code differently. This is called syntax highlighting.

The word “print” is orange because Python recognizes it as a *keyword*. Keywords are special words that are reserved by the Python language, and have special meaning. This means that whenever you write Python code, print always means that it will print the result.

The phrase “Hello, world!” is colored green. That means that Python knows this is a special *type* called a string (written `str` when you refer to it in Python code). In Python, you can represent strings by enclosing characters in single (') or double (") quotes. You can also nest them. The following are valid Python strings:

- “Hello!”

- `'Hi!'`
- `"I really like 'Python'!"`

Finally, the result, "Hello, world!", is colored blue. This means that it is the result displayed in the shell. (There are other uses for blue in IDLE, but we won't be covering them in this class. Look up the keyword "class" and Object Oriented Programming if you're curious.)

Types: `str`, `int`, `float`

So far, we have introduced a *type* called `str`. In addition to using strings in print statements, you can also concatenate them together:

```
>>> print "Hello," + " world!"
Hello, world!
```

There are many other types in Python. For example, two more basic types are *int* and *float*. These store integers and floating-point numbers, respectively.

We can use the `print` statement with `ints` and `floats` as well:

```
>>> print 4
4

>>> print 6.
6.0

>>> print 2.3914
2.3914
```

In this example, 4 is an `int` and 6. and 2.3914 are `floats`.

We can also combine `ints` and `floats`. In Python, combining two `ints` gives an `int` result, but combining an `int` and a `float` or two `floats` gives a `float` result. For example:

```
>>> print 4 + 6
10

>>> print 6. - 3
3.0

>>> print 2 * 10.0
20.0

>>> print 2 / 10.0
0.2

>>> print 7 % 2
1

>>> print 2 ** 3
8
```

However, not all results are you might expect:

```
>>> print 2 / 3
0
```

The result of an `int` divided by an `int` is an `int`, so Python *rounds this down*. This can lead to very unexpected behavior, so if you're doing a division, it's good to make sure either the numerator or denominator is a float.

## Variables

So far, all of our computations have been very simple. However, sometimes you want to re-use values, and to do that you need to store them in *variables*. You can use a variable similar to how you would in algebra. You give it a name, store a value in it, and you can use or change that value later.

In Python, you create or update a variable using '=', with the name on the left and the result on the right:

```
>>> a = 2
>>> print a
2
>>> b = 5
>>> print a + b
7
```

In some other programming languages ("statically-typed" languages), you have to keep a variable the same type for its entire lifetime. Python is a "dynamically-typed" language, so you can change the type of value stored in the variable:

```
>>> someVar = 2
>>> print someVar
2
>>> someVar = "Why hello there"
>>> print someVar
Why hello there
```

## Variable Names

Like many other languages, there are some restrictions on what you can name your variables. Variable names must:

- be at least one character long
- contain only A-Z, a-z, 0-9, and \_
- not start with a number
- not be a keyword

Similar to the last bullet point, there are some other names in Python that are not keywords, but are reserved. It is generally a bad idea to have variable names of the form `__stuff__` (note the double `_`, not just single `_`), because Python can make those keywords in the future. Finally, by convention, Python variable names do not usually start with a capital letter.

## Getting user input

Python provides some handy functions for getting user input. In Python 2.x, there are two choices, `input` and `raw_input`. We will only use `raw_input`, because it always returns a `str`. (The function `input` *evaluates* its input, which can be very dangerous if you're not careful. We will not use that function in this course.)

Side note: Python 3.x only provides a single function called `input`, which behaves like Python 2.x's `raw_input` function.

Here is an example using `raw_input`:

```
>>> favoriteColor = raw_input("What is your favorite color? ")
What is your favorite color? teal
>>> print "Your favorite color is", favoriteColor
Your favorite color is teal
```

This example introduces a few new concepts, which we go into below.

## Functions

In this example, `raw_input` is colored purple. This is because it is a *function* that is built-in to Python. This means it's also a good idea not to name your variables anything that turns purple – it already has a meaning and you'll get some weird behavior! (See <https://docs.python.org/2/library/functions.html> for a full list of built-in functions.)

You can *call* a function by putting parentheses after its name. The inputs to the function go inside those parentheses, and are called the *arguments* or *parameters*. The function `raw_input` only takes one input, an optional parameter. You can see this in the documentation:

### `raw_input([prompt])`

If the *prompt* argument is present, it is written to standard output without a trailing newline. The function then reads a line from input, converts it to a string (stripping a trailing newline), and returns that. When EOF is read, `EOFError` is raised. Example:

```
>>> s = raw_input('--> ')
--> Monty Python's Flying Circus
>>> s
"Monty Python's Flying Circus"
```

The `[]` around `prompt` mean that it's optional. If you don't give any arguments to `raw_input` it just gives an empty line for you to enter your input.

```
>>> favoriteColor = raw_input()
teal
```

Also note the space at the end of the input "What is your favorite color? ". Without the space, there is no space between the prompt and your answer, so it's nice to add the space for usability.

## Printing multiple values

The `print` keyword can take in multiple values, separated by commas. It creates a string from the values, and puts a space wherever you had commas separating values.

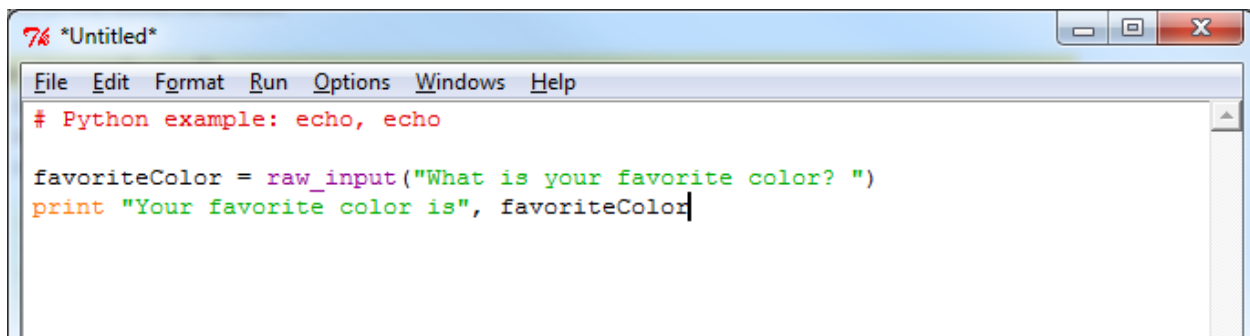
```
>>> print 4, 2, 9
4 2 9
```

If you don't want spaces, you can use the built-in function `str` to change the value to a string and then *concatenate* the strings using the `+` operator.

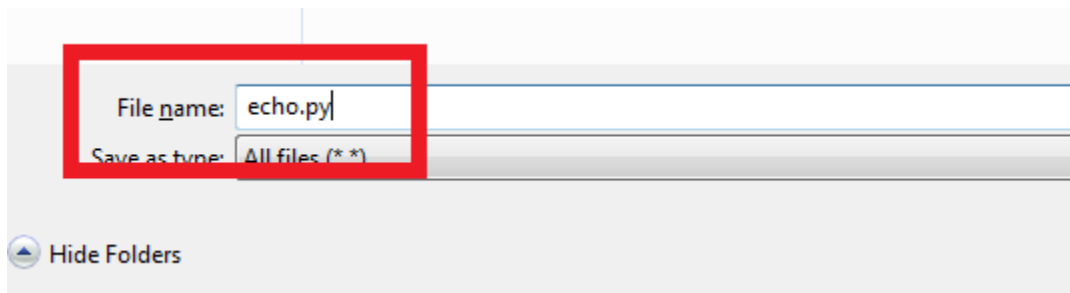
```
>>> print "a" + str(1) + "b" + str(2)
alb2
```

## Creating a .py file

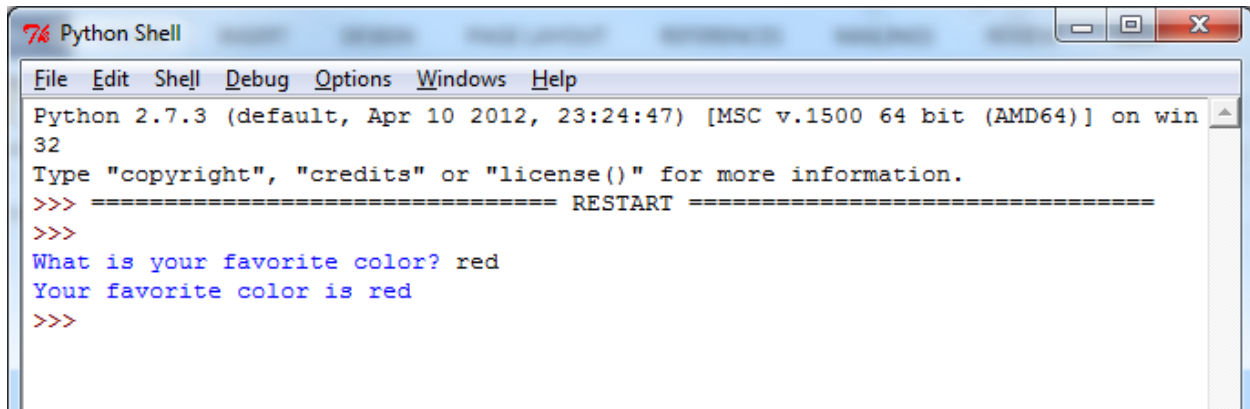
If you want to save your work in IDLE, you can create a `.py` file. From the shell, go to File -> New Window, or type Ctrl-N. You can type your code here and save it, but **make sure you enter `.py` as the file extension**. Historically, IDLE has not been great about this and won't give your file an extension, so you don't get syntax highlighting (the colors).



When you are done with your program, go to Run -> Run Module (or hit F5), save your file (don't forget to make the extension `.py!`), and it will run.



If you don't have an open Shell window, IDLE will open a new one for you:



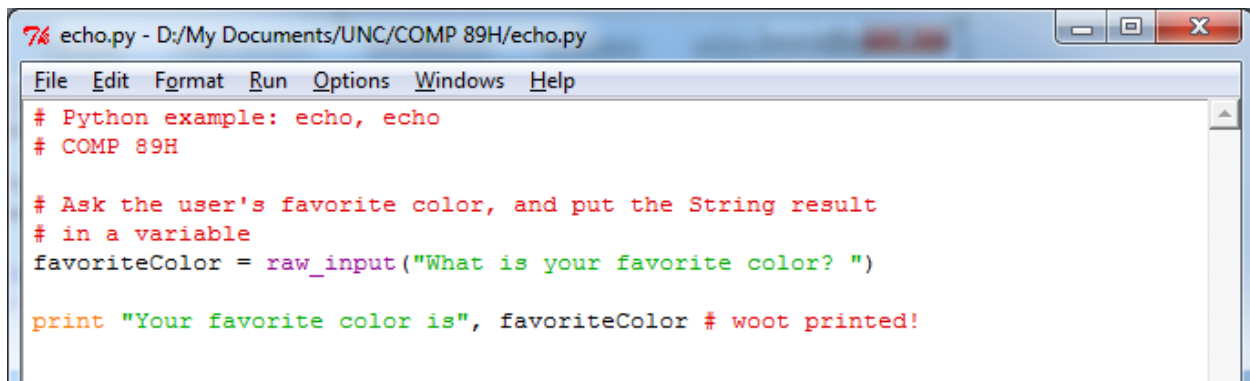
```
Python Shell
File Edit Shell Debug Options Windows Help
Python 2.7.3 (default, Apr 10 2012, 23:24:47) [MSC v.1500 64 bit (AMD64)] on win
32
Type "copyright", "credits" or "license()" for more information.
>>> ===== RESTART =====
>>>
What is your favorite color? red
Your favorite color is red
>>>
```

Note the “RESTART” – if you had an open Shell window, whatever session you had in the Shell is discarded (i.e. your variables are gone), so keep that in mind.

## Comments

You might notice, at the top of the file there is a line of red text. Any line that starts with # in Python is a *comment*. This line is not code that gets run, and it is helpful for any readers of your code (including yourself!) to include comments. You can put a comment at the top of a file saying what the file is for, or above or at the end of a line of code saying what it does.

You probably won’t want to comment every line, but it is better to start out over-commenting and tone it down over time than to never comment and chance having hard-to-understand code.



```
echo.py - D:/My Documents/UNC/COMP 89H/echo.py
File Edit Format Run Options Windows Help
# Python example: echo, echo
# COMP 89H

# Ask the user's favorite color, and put the String result
# in a variable
favoriteColor = raw_input("What is your favorite color? ")

print "Your favorite color is", favoriteColor # woot printed!
```

## Printing, again

Make sure you remember the print statement in your .py file if you want to see any output in the Shell window. In the Shell, you could skip the print and it would just tell you the result. In .py files, it’s your job to specify what you want to see as output.

## Conditionals

You might want your program to take certain actions depending on some *condition*. Here we introduce the concept of *conditionals*.

## Data type: Boolean

Before introducing conditionals, we need to understand the concepts of `True` and `False` in Python. These are a data type called Booleans (`bool` in Python). Note that you'll need to capitalize the T and F or Python will not recognize them. Also, they should turn purple in IDLE.

## Comparing values

You can compare values with `==` and `!=`, as well as `<`, `<=`, `>`, and `>=`. The result of any of these expressions is `True` or `False`.

```
>>> a = 2
>>> b = 5
>>> a > b
False
>>> a <= b
True
>>> a == b # does a equal b?
False
>>> a != b # does a not-equal b?
True
```

We can even combine these expressions (parentheses are your friends) or use `True` and `False` in them:

```
>>> a = 2
>>> b = 5
>>> False == (a > b)
True
```

## Keywords: and/or/not

Python provides the keywords `and`, `or`, and `not` to allow for combining conditionals. If you haven't been exposed to Boolean logic, it works a lot like you might expect just reading it aloud.

```
>>> a = 2
>>> b = 5
>>> a < b and False
False
>>> a < b or a == b
True
>>> a < b and a == b
False

>>> True and False
False
>>> True and True
True
>>> True or False
True

>>> not True
False
```

```
>>> not False
True

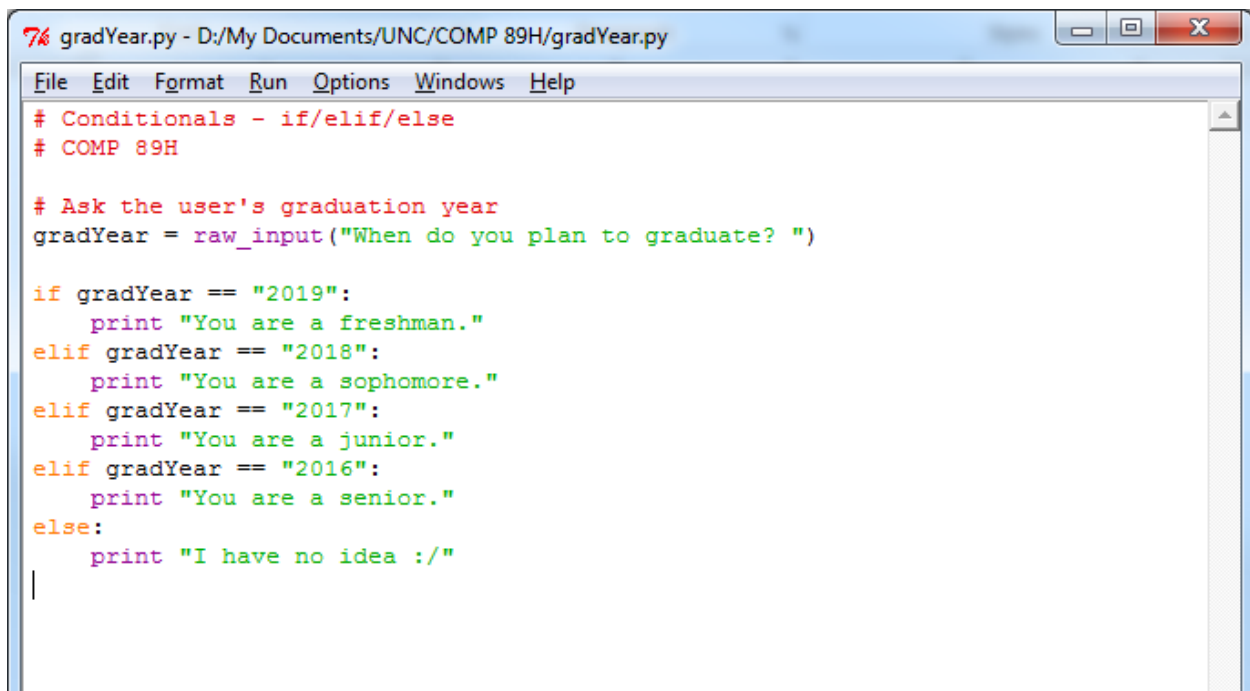
>>> True and (False or not True)
False
>>> True and (False or not False)
True
```

Summary:

- `and` results in `True` only if both parts evaluate to `True`, and `False` otherwise
- `or` results in `True` if either part evaluates to `True`, and is only `False` if both parts evaluate to `False`
- `not` is `True` if the expression after it evaluates to `False`, and vice versa

## if/elif/else

It is common to write a program to take different actions based on the value of some input. For example, you might want to ask the user's graduation year, and then tell them their year in school. Python provides three keywords to help with this: `if`, `elif`, and `else`.



```
7% gradYear.py - D:/My Documents/UNC/COMP 89H/gradYear.py
File Edit Format Run Options Windows Help
# Conditionals - if/elif/else
# COMP 89H

# Ask the user's graduation year
gradYear = raw_input("When do you plan to graduate? ")

if gradYear == "2019":
    print "You are a freshman."
elif gradYear == "2018":
    print "You are a sophomore."
elif gradYear == "2017":
    print "You are a junior."
elif gradYear == "2016":
    print "You are a senior."
else:
    print "I have no idea :/"
|
```

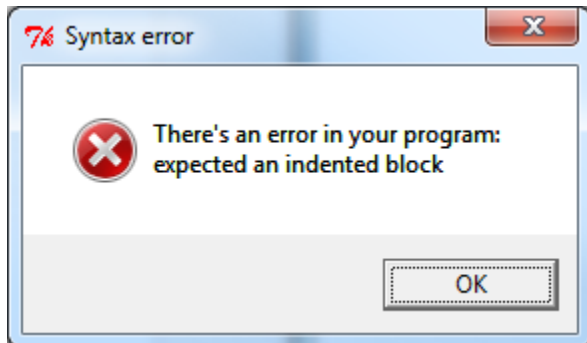
If the condition `gradYear == "2019"` is true, then the `print` statement below it is executed. If it is false, Python continues on to the `elif`. It will try each condition, and execute the *block* indented under it for the first condition that is true. It only executes one block, so if the `if` condition is true, it does not even check the other conditions. Similarly, if the second `elif`'s condition is true, it will not check the third `elif` or the `else`.

Note: after the condition for an `if` or an `elif`, you need a colon. An `else` statement has no condition, so it just has a colon after the `else`.



## Indentation

Unlike many other languages, indentation is very important in Python. If you don't indent one of the print statements, or you indent lines more than they should be, you will get an error like the following:



IDLE will try to show you where it found the unexpected indentation by highlighting the assumed culprit:

```
# Ask the user's graduation
gradYear = raw_input("When

if gradYear == "2019":
print "You are a freshman."
elif gradYear == "2018":
    print "You are a sophom
elif gradYear == "2017":
```

Print is purple?!

Sometimes IDLE will color `print` purple. In Python 3.x, `print` is more explicitly a function. In Python 2.x, IDLE enjoys switching the color of `print` between orange and purple. This should not trouble you too much – just remember that you should treat it as a keyword, so don't name any variables `print`.

## Comparing to the result of `raw_input`

It's a common mistake to forget that `raw_input` returns a string. Make sure you're careful about this – you can either *cast* the result to an `int`, or compare the result to a `str`.

You can always check conditions quickly in the shell:

```
>>> gradYear = raw_input("When do you plan to graduate? ")
When do you plan to graduate? 2019
>>> gradYear == 2019
False
>>> gradYear == "2019"
True
>>> int(gradYear) == 2019 # cast gradYear to an int
True
```

Python will give a `ValueError` if you try to cast to an `int` something that isn't:

```
>>> gradYear = raw_input("When do you plan to graduate? ")
When do you plan to graduate? Sometime
>>> int(gradYear) == 2019
```

```
Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<pyshell#4>", line 1, in <module>
    int(gradYear) == 2019
ValueError: invalid literal for int() with base 10: 'sometime'
```

## Data type: List

So far, we've seen four types: `str`, `int`, `float`, and `bool`. There is another that we'll use heavily: `list`. A `list` is a collection of objects. You can store a `list` in a variable, and update specific *elements*, or even add to `lists` together or add something at the end of a `list`. Unlike some other languages, a `list` can contain any type of value, even other `lists`!

### Creating a list

You create a `list` by surrounding one or more (comma-separated) values with square brackets (next to the 'p' on your keyboard).

```
>>> myList = ['apples', 42, 3.14]
>>> myList
['apples', 42, 3.14]

>>> otherList = [17, 2, myList]
>>> otherList
[17, 2, ['apples', 42, 3.14]]
```

A `list` inside of another is called a *nested* `list`.

### Accessing list elements

To access a specific element of a `list`, you use square brackets, with the *index* of the element you want inside. In Python, like many other languages, the first element has index 0. Unlike some languages, you can also index from the end of the `list`. The last element has index -1.

```
>>> myList = ['apples', 42, 3.14]
>>> myList[0]
'apples'

>>> myList[-1]
3.14
```

To access a range of elements, you give two values. The range they define starts at the first index, and goes up to *but does not include* the second element. The result of accessing a range will be another `list`.

```
>>> myList = ['apples', 42, 3.14]
>>> myList[0:2]
['apples', 42]
```

If you don't provide one of the numbers, it assumes you mean the beginning or end of the `list`.

```
>>> myList = ['apples', 42, 3.14]
```

```
>>> myList[:2] # 0 to (but not including) 2
['apples', 42]

>>> myList[1:] # 1 to the end
[42, 3.14]
```

## Modifying list elements

You can replace a single element of a list by specifying its index and using '=':

```
>>> myList = ['apples', 42, 3.14]
>>> myList
['apples', 42, 3.14]

>>> myList[2] = 'banana' # update the element in index 2
>>> myList
['apples', 42, 'banana']
```

## Adding to a list

To add a new value to the end of a list, use Python's built-in list method `append`. This method uses a notation we haven't seen yet. You provide the name of the list you want to modify, a period, and then the *call* to append (including parentheses and the parameter).

```
>>> myList = [1,2,3]
>>> myList
[1, 2, 3]

>>> myList.append(4)
>>> myList
[1, 2, 3, 4]
```

## Data type: None

Note that you don't need to set the result of `myList.append(4)` to be a variable, because it *modifies* the list given before the period. In fact, you won't want to set this to anything, because the method `append` doesn't *return* anything. (We'll get more into what return means later.)

Using our previous example, we can again modify the list:

```
>>> newList = myList.append(5)
>>> newList
>>> myList
[1, 2, 3]
```

Here we have an oddity – `newList` didn't display anything in the shell. This is because its value is `None` (remember, `append` didn't return anything so there was nothing to set `newList` equal to). We can explicitly tell the shell to print the value of `newList` to see this:

```
>>> print newList
None
```

Just like any other value, you can set a variable equal to `None`. We can even compare it to `newList`:

```
>>> a = None
>>> newList == a
True
```

Finally, note that `None` turns purple, just like `True` and `False`. If it doesn't turn purple in IDLE, make sure you remembered to capitalize the 'N', and that your file is saved with a `.py` extension.

## Loops

With what we know already, it would be straightforward to write a program that echoes the letters of a user's input. Just like with `lists`, you can index into a `str` to get a single character. For example, you could write:

```
word = raw_input("Please enter a word: ")

print word[0]
print word[1]
print word[2]
print word[3]
```

However, this approach has some drawbacks. If the user enters a word with more than 4 letters, not all of them will be printed. Even worse, if the user enters a word with only three letters, IDLE will give an error:

```
>>> ===== RESTART =====
>>>
Please enter a word: cat
c
a
t

Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "D:\My Documents\UNC\COMP 089H\printing_letters.py", line 9, in <module>
    print word[3]
IndexError: string index out of range
>>>
```

We could get around this by checking for various string lengths, using the built-in function `len`:

```
word = raw_input("Please enter a word: ")

if len(word) == 1:
    print word[0]
elif len(word) == 2:
    print word[0]
    print word[1]
elif len(word) == 3:
    print word[0]
    print word[1]
    print word[2]
elif len(word) == 4:
    print word[0]
```

```
print word[1]
print word[2]
print word[3]
```

Not only is this approach painfully repetitive, but the word entered can be any of a variety of lengths. More importantly, it requires us to *hard-code* the possible word lengths in the code. It would be better to be able to take some action for each letter, without having to take into account the number of letters explicitly.

## For loops

Python provides for loops that fit our needs perfectly. They use the keywords `for` and `in`.

### For-each

Some other programming languages have the concept of “for-each” loops. In Python, all `for` loops behave this way. Namely, the variable you define is set to each *value* in the iterable:

```
>>> for letter in "hello!":
    print letter
```

```
h
e
l
l
o
!
```

To write a `for` loop, you pick a name for the *loop variable*, provide the *iterable* to iterate over, and then put a block of code indented under the `for` line. For `strs` and `lists`, Python assigns each element to the variable name you define, then runs the block of indented code. The iterable you define can be defined in-place or, more often, a variable:

```
>>> myList = [1, 4, 9]
>>> for val in myList:
    print val
```

```
1
4
9
```

If you try to write a `for` loop without an iterable, Python will throw a `TypeError`:

```

>>> for val in 4:
    print val

Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<pyshell#2>", line 1, in <module>
    for val in 4:
TypeError: 'int' object is not iterable
>>> |

```

## For-index

Sometimes you might want to do something given the index of an element in an iterable. To facilitate this, Python provides the built-in method `range`, which is powerful when combined with `len`. When used with one input, `range` returns a list containing the numbers 0 to that value, *exclusive*. You can provide two inputs to define the starting point of the range, and three to define the step amount. If you forget, watch for the tool-tip that pops up in IDLE once you type the '(' after `range`:

```

>>> range(5)
[0, 1, 2, 3, 4]
>>> range(2,5)
[2, 3, 4]
>>> range(1,10,1)
[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]
>>> range(0,10,2)
[0, 2, 4, 6, 8]
>>> range(

```

`range([start,] stop[, step]) -> list of integers`

Recall that indices in Python start at 0. Therefore, the indices for a list go from 0 to 1 less than the length of the list. This is what makes `range` and `len` very powerful together. Remember that they are both functions, so you *call* them with parentheses, and put the input inside. Because `len` returns an `int`, that can be used as input to `range`:

```

>>> myList = ["apple", "banana", "cantaloupe"]
>>> for i in range(len(myList)):
    print "The fruit at position", i, "is", myList[i]

```

```

The fruit at position 0 is apple
The fruit at position 1 is banana
The fruit at position 2 is cantaloupe

```

This is the same as if you'd written it out without chained function calls, and makes the for-each-ness of all Python `for` loops more obvious:

```

>>> myList = ["apple", "banana", "cantaloupe"]
>>> length = len(myList)

```

```

>>> length
3
>>> indexRange = range(length)
>>> indexRange
[0, 1, 2]
>>> for i in indexRange:
    print "The fruit at position", i, "is", myList[i]

The fruit at position 0 is apple
The fruit at position 1 is banana
The fruit at position 2 is cantaloupe

```

## While loops

Although `for` loops are great if you know how many times you want to repeat, sometimes you want to repeat *until* a condition changes. For example, you might want to echo user input until the user enters a specific stop-word.

This is a good time for a `while` loop. Like `for` loops, you put a colon at the end of the line and indent the *body* of the loop below that. Unlike `for` loops, you specify a *condition* that defines when the loop should continue:

```

>>> ans = ''
>>> while ans != '.':
    ans = raw_input("Please enter a word, or '.' to quit: ")
    print "You said:", ans

Please enter a word, or '.' To quit: apple
You said: apple
Please enter a word, or '.' To quit: banana
You said: banana
Please enter a word, or '.' To quit: .
You said: .

```

Of course, you could clean this up with conditionals to avoid echoing the '.', but it gets the idea across.

## Infinite loops

One common mistake, even among experienced programmers, is to forget to change whatever value the `while` loop condition checks. For example, if you used a `while` loop to print the squares of 1-10, you might write it like this:

```

>>> num = 1
>>> while num <= 10: # I will never stop :o
    print num * num

```

If you run this, be ready to hit Ctrl-C to cancel IDLE's computations. You should see 1 printed until you cancel the command or IDLE gives up.

With `while` loops, you have to explicitly change the value that you're checking. In this case, that means we have to *increment* `num`:

```
>>> num = 1
>>> while num <= 10: # much better
    print num * num
    num += 1 # same as num = num + 1
```

## Functions

So far, we've only used Python as a scripting language, by typing commands in a `.py` file or in the shell, and seeing their immediate results. Sometimes you might want to change a single value and run a large chunk of code again to see the difference. You could do this by creating a *function*.

We've already seen a bunch of built-in functions, and a method that belongs to a specific type:

- `int`
- `str`
- `raw_input`
- `range`
- `len`
- `append` # belongs to lists, make sure to call it like `myList.append(...)`

You can easily create your own functions in python using the keyword `def`. You will need a name for the function, and to make up names for its parameters. By convention, function names in Python start with lowercase letters.

```
>>> def myAddFunction(a, b):
    print a + b
```

```
>>> myAddFunction(2, 6)
8
```

Notice that Python colors the keyword `def` orange, but the function name is colored blue to help it stand out. In the example above, `a` and `b` are the names of the parameters. This doesn't mean that you have to provide variables that already have those names, but rather that whatever goes before the first comma in the argument list gets assigned to `a`, and whatever goes second gets stored in `b` for the duration of the function.

### print versus return

It's not always helpful to have a function that just prints something. If you wanted to use `myAddFunction` in an expression with other values, it would fail:



```

>>> def myAddFunction(a, b):
>>>     print a + b

>>> myAddFunction(1,2) * myAddFunction(3,4) # expect: 3 * 7 = 21
3
7

Traceback (most recent call last):
  File "<pyshell#59>", line 1, in <module>
    myAddFunction(1,2) * myAddFunction(3,4) # expect: 3 * 7 = 21
TypeError: unsupported operand type(s) for *: 'NoneType' and 'NoneType'
>>>

```

Like the list method `append`, the function we defined doesn't *return* anything. In our case, it prints the values 1+2 and 3+4, but then returns `None` in each case. Unfortunately, you can't use `*` with `None`.

If we want to be able to do more than just print the sum, we should instead *return* it from the function using the keyword `return`:

```

TypeError: unsupported operand type(s) for *: 'NoneType' a
>>>
>>> def myBetterAddFunction(a, b):
>>>     return a + b

>>> myBetterAddFunction(1,2) * myBetterAddFunction(3,4)
21
>>> |

```

Because we are now *returning* the value `a+b`, each call to `myBetterAddFunction` effectively gets replaced with its result (in this example, these are `ints`), before multiplying them.

Note: this is the same as:

```

>>>
>>> firstNum = myBetterAddFunction(1,2)
>>> secondNum = myBetterAddFunction(3,4)
>>> firstNum * secondNum
21
>>> |

```

## Python modules and packages

Python provides a variety of built-in modules that you can use. For example, if you wanted to calculate math functions like the square root of a number or the sine of a number, you would use `math`.

You import a module using the `import` keyword. Then, whenever you want to use anything (functions, etc.) in it, you preface that with "moduleName.", like "math.":

```

>>> import math
>>> math.sqrt(4)
2.0

```

```
>>> math.sin(math.pi) # note: e-16 is very close to 0
1.2246467991473532e-16
```

You can also download useful Python packages, such as TkInter and pygame for GUIs and games, NumPy and SciPy for scientific computing, or the Python Imaging Library for image editing:

- <https://wiki.python.org/moin/TkInter>
- <http://www.pygame.org/hifi.html>
- <http://www.numpy.org/>
- <http://www.scipy.org/>
- <http://pythonware.com/products/pil/>

## Application: File Input/Output

Python provides us with some useful methods for file I/O. To open a file, you provide its location (relative or absolute), and how you intend to access it ('r' to read, 'w' to write, 'a' to append; note that 'w' completely overwrites its contents). If you don't provide an access mode, Python defaults to 'r'.

### Reading lines in a file

The file object returned from `open` is an iterable, so you can use a for loop to iterate over its lines:

```
>>> f = open("textfile.txt.", 'r')
>>> for line in f:
    print line
// My favorite foods

popcorn

apples, green grapes
>>> f.close() # don't forget to close the file when you're done!
```

### Handling lines in a file

As you can see in the previous example, there are empty lines between lines of the file. This is because in text files, the string "\n" or "\r\n" tells the text editor that there is a new line before the next character. This whitespace can get messy, so Python provides a string method to strip away the excess whitespace:

```
>>> f = open("textfile.txt.", 'r')
>>> for line in f:
    s = line.strip()
    print s
// My favorite foods
popcorn
apples, green grapes
>>> f.close() # don't forget to close the file when you're done!
```

The `strip` method removes leading and trailing whitespace, i.e. newline characters, tab characters ("\t"), and spaces at the beginning and end of the string.

It would also be convenient to easily split up lines, for example at commas or semicolons. For this, there is the string method `split`. It takes a separator and returns a list of `strs`:

```
>>> f = open("textfile.txt.", 'r')
>>> for line in f:
    s = line.strip()
    vals = s.split(',')
    print vals
[ '// My favorite foods' ]
[ 'popcorn' ]
[ 'apples', ' green grapes' ]
>>> f.close() # don't forget to close the file when you're done!
```

However, because there was a space after the comma, the string " green grapes" still has a leading space. We can use `strip` again, along with a `for` loop for the values in the split list:

```
>>> f = open("textfile.txt.", 'r')
>>> for line in f:
    s = line.strip()
    vals = s.split(',')
    for val in vals:
        print val.strip()
// My favorite foods
popcorn
apples
green grapes
>>> f.close() # don't forget to close the file when you're done!
```

Finally, my file contains a comment, indicated by a line starting with `//`. It would be nice to ignore that line. We can do that by using an `if` statement and checking if the line starts with `//`.

```
>>> f = open("textfile.txt.", 'r')
>>> for line in f:
    s = line.strip()

    # Ignore comment lines
    if not s.startswith("//"):
        vals = s.split(',')
        for val in vals:
            print val

popcorn
apples
green grapes
>>> f.close() # don't forget to close the file when you're done!
```

## Writing to a file

If you have data in your code that you want to output to a file, you can open a file and use the `write` method to add text to it. Don't forget to add new-line characters if you want separate lines in your file!

```
>>> myList = ['a', 'b', 'c']
>>> f = open("newfile.txt.", 'w') # writing now
>>> for val in myList:
    f.write(val + '\n') # put on separate lines
>>> f.close() # don't forget to close the file when you're done!
```

This writes out the file:

```
a
b
c
```