Testing

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Testing

• Programming to analyze data is powerful
• It’s useless if the results are not correct
• Correctness is far more important than speed
Testing = double-checking results

• How do you know your program is right?
  – Compare its output to a correct output

• How do you know a correct output?
  – Real data is big
    – You wrote a computer program because it is not convenient to compute it by hand

• Use small inputs so you can compute by hand

• Example (HW3): standard deviation $s = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N-1} \sum_{i=1}^{N} (x_i - \bar{x})^2}$
  – What are good tests for sample_std?
Testing ≠ debugging

• Testing: determining whether your program is correct
  – Doesn’t say where or how your program is incorrect

• Debugging: locating the specific defect in your program, and fixing it
  – 2 key ideas:
    – divide and conquer
    – the scientific method
What is a test?

• A test consists of:
  – an input (sometimes called “test data”)
  – an oracle (a predicate (boolean expression) of the output)

• Example test for sum:
  – input: [1, 2, 3]
  – oracle: result is 6
  – write the test as: sum([1, 2, 3]) == 6

• Example test for sqrt:
  – input: 3.14
  – oracle: result is within 0.00001 of 1.772
  – ways to write the test:
    • sqrt(3.14) – 1.772) < 0.00001 and sqrt(3.14) – 1.772) > -0.00001
    • -0.00001 < sqrt(3.14) – 1.772 < 0.00001
    • math.abs(sqrt(3.14) – 1.772) < 0.00001
Test results

• The test **passes** if the boolean expression evaluates to **True**
• The test **fails** if the boolean expression evaluates to **False**
• Use the **assert** statement:
  ```python
  assert sum([1, 2, 3]) == 6
  assert math.abs(sqrt(3.14) - 1.772) < 0.00001
  ```
• **assert True** does nothing
• **assert False** crashes the program
Where to write test cases

• At the top level: is run every time you load your program
  
  ```python
def hypotenuse(a, b):
    ...
    assert hypotenuse(3, 4) == 5
    assert hypotenuse(5, 12) == 13
  ```

• In a test function: is run when you invoke the function

  ```python
def test_hypotenuse():
    ...
    def test_hypotenuse():
      assert hypotenuse(3, 4) == 5
      assert hypotenuse(5, 12) == 13
  ```
Assertions are not just for test cases

• Use assertions throughout your code
• Documents what you think is true about your algorithm
• Lets you know immediately when something goes wrong
  – The longer between a code mistake and the programmer noticing, the harder it is to debug

• Common, but unfortunate, course of events:
  – Code contains a mistake (incorrect assumption or algorithm)
  – Intermediate value (e.g., in local variable, or result of a function call) is incorrect
  – That value is used in other computations, or copied into other variables
  – Eventually, the user notices that the overall program produces a wrong result
  – Where is the mistake in the program? It could be anywhere.

• Suppose you had 10 assertions evenly distributed in your code
  – When one fails, you can localize the mistake to 1/10 of your code (the part between the last assertion that passes and the first one that fails)
Where to write assertions

- Function entry: are arguments legal?
  - Place blame on the caller before the function fails
- Function exit: is result correct?
- Places with tricky or interesting code
- Assertions are ordinary statements; e.g., can appear within a loop:
  ```python
  for n in myNumbers:
      assert type(n) == int() or type(n) == float()
  ```
- Don’t clutter the code (same rule as for comments)
- Don’t write assertions that are certain to succeed
  - The existence of an assertion tells a programmer that it might possibly fail
- Don’t write an assertion if the following code would fail informatively
  ```python
  assert type(name) == str() … "Hello, " + name …
  ```
- Write assertions where they may be useful for debugging
What to write assertions about

• Results of computations
• Correctly-formed data structures
  – Recall code that emulated a dictionary using two lists
    
    ```python
    assert len(list1) == len(list2)
    ```
When to write tests

• Two possibilities:
  – Write code first, then write tests
  – Write tests first, then write code
• It’s best to write tests first
• If you write the code first, you remember the implementation while writing the tests
  – You are likely to make the same mistakes in the implementation
• If you write the tests first, you will think more about the functionality than about a particular implementation
  – You might notice some aspect of behavior that you would have made a mistake about
Write the whole test

• A common mistake:
  1. Write the function
  2. Make up test inputs
  3. Run the function
  4. Use the result as the oracle

• You didn’t write a test, but only half of a test
  – Created the tests inputs, but not the oracle

• The test does not determine whether the function is correct
  – Only determines that it continues to be as correct (or incorrect) as it was before
def roots(a, b, c):
    
    """Returns a list of the two roots of ax**2 + bx + c."""

    ...

Bad test of implementation-specific behavior:
assert roots(1, 0, 1) == [1, -1]

Assertions inside a routine can be for implementation-specific behavior
Tests prevent you from introducing errors when you change a function

• Abstraction: the implementation details do not matter

• Preventing introducing errors when you make a change is called “regression testing”
Write tests that cover all the functionality

• Think about and test “corner cases”
  – Empty list
  – Zero
  – int vs. float values
def mean(numbers):
    """Returns the average of the argument list. The argument must be a non-empty list of numbers.""
    return sum(numbers)/len(numbers)

# Tests
assert mean([1, 2, 3, 4, 5]) == 3
assert mean([1, 2.1, 3.2]) == 2.1

This implementation is elegant, but wrong!

mean([1, 2, 3, 4])
def mean(numbers):
    """Returns the average of the argument list.
    The argument must be a non-empty list of numbers.""
    return sum(numbers)/len(numbers)

Unnecessary tests. Don’t write these:
mean([1, 2, “hello”])
mean(“hello”)
mean([])