Testing

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Testing

• Programming to analyze data is powerful
• It’s useless (or worse!) if the results are not correct
• Correctness is far more important than speed
Famous examples

• Ariane 5 rocket (1996)
  ➢ fault in the software in the inertial navigation system (link)

• Therac-25 radiation therapy machine (1986/1987)
  ➢ Fatal overdose due to software bugs and no external controls (link)
Testing does not **prove** correctness

“Program testing can be used to show the presence of bugs, but never to show their absence!”

- Edsger Dijkstra

• Testing can only increase our confidence in program correctness.
• Exhaustive testing (e.g. testing all possible inputs) is generally not possible
• Instead we have to be smart about testing
Testing your program

• 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 the expected output by hand
  – We did this in HW2 and HW3 with small data sets
Testing parts of your program

• Often called “unit testing”
• Testing that the output of individual functions is correct.
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”)
  – expected output

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

• Example test for **sqrt**:
  – input: 3.14
  – expected output: 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`
• 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
  – and prints a message
Where to write test cases

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

• In a **test function**: is run when you invoke the function
  ```python
def hypotenuse(a, b):
    ... body of hypotenuse ...
def test_hypotenuse():
    assert hypotenuse(3, 4) == 5
    assert hypotenuse(5, 12) == 13
# test_hypotenuse()  # As in HW 3
```
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
Assertions make debugging easier

• 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 of expected type/size/value/shape?
  – 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
  ```
Where *not* to write assertions

- 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  
    ```python
    a = 5
    assert a == 5  # Not needed!
    ```

- Don’t need to write an assertion if the following code would fail informatively:  
  ```python
  assert type(name) == str
  print("Hello, " + name)
  ```

- Write assertions where they may be useful for debugging
What to write assertions about

• Results of computations
• Correctly-formed data structures

assert 0 <= index < len(mylist)
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 that you made in the implementation (e.g. assuming that negative values would never be present in a list of numbers)

• 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, some special case of input that you would have forgotten to handle
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 expected output – BAD!!

• You didn’t write a full test: only half of a test!
  – Created the tests inputs, but not the expected output

• 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
Coming up with good test cases

- Think about and test “corner cases”
  - abs(val)
  - find_max(lst)
Coming up with good test cases

• Think about and test “corner cases”
  – Numbers:
    • int vs. float values (remember not to test for equality with floats)
    • Zero
    • Negative values
  – Lists:
    • Empty list
    • Lists containing duplicate values (including all the same value)
    • Lists in ascending order/descending order
    • Mix of types in list (if specification does not rule out)
Tests outside of function body are for behavior described in the specification

def roots(a, b, c):
    """Returns a list of the two roots of ax**2 + bx + c."""

What is wrong with this test?
assert roots(1, 0, -1) == [-1, 1]

• Does the specification imply that this should be the order these two roots are returned?
• Assertions inside a routine can be used for implementation-specific behavior
Tests prevent you from introducing errors when you modify a function body

• **Abstraction**: the implementation details do not matter

• As long as the specification of the function remains the same, tests of the external behavior of the function should still apply.

• Preventing introducing errors when you make a change is called “regression testing”
Testing Approaches

• **Black box testing** - Choose test data *without* looking at the implementation, just test behavior mentioned in the *specification*

• **Glass box (white box, clear box) testing** - Choose test data *with* knowledge of the *implementation*. Test that all paths through your code are exercised and correct. Examples:
  – If statement with several elifs, make sure your test cases will execute all branches
  – For loop, test if it is executed never, once, >1, max times
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([])

Finally: Be aware that tests might not reveal all existing/possible errors
What to test?

def isBigger(x, y):
    """ Assumes x and y are ints.
    Returns True if x is greater than y,
    and False otherwise.
    """