Praise for *Effective Python*

“Each item in Slatkin’s *Effective Python* teaches a self-contained lesson with its own source code. This makes the book random-access: Items are easy to browse and study in whatever order the reader needs. I will be recommending *Effective Python* to students as an admirably compact source of mainstream advice on a very broad range of topics for the intermediate Python programmer.”

—Brandon Rhodes, software engineer at Dropbox and chair of PyCon 2016-2017

“I’ve been programming in Python for years and thought I knew it pretty well. Thanks to this treasure trove of tips and techniques, I realize there’s so much more I could be doing with my Python code to make it faster (e.g., using built-in data structures), easier to read (e.g., enforcing keyword-only arguments), and much more Pythonic (e.g., using zip to iterate over lists in parallel).”

—Pamela Fox, educationeer, Khan Academy

“If I had this book when I first switched from Java to Python, it would have saved me many months of repeated code rewrites, which happened each time I realized I was doing particular things ‘non-Pythonically.’ This book collects the vast majority of basic Python ‘must-knows’ into one place, eliminating the need to stumble upon them one-by-one over the course of months or years. The scope of the book is impressive, starting with the importance of PEP8 as well as that of major Python idioms, then reaching through function, method and class design, effective standard library use, quality API design, testing, and performance measurement—this book really has it all. A fantastic introduction to what it really means to be a Python programmer for both the novice and the experienced developer.”

—Mike Bayer, creator of SQLAlchemy

“*Effective Python* will take your Python skills to the next level with clear guidelines for improving Python code style and function.”

—Leah Culver, developer advocate, Dropbox

“This book is an exceptionally great resource for seasoned developers in other languages who are looking to quickly pick up Python and move beyond the basic language constructs into more Pythonic code. The organization of the book is clear, concise, and easy to digest, and each item and chapter can stand on its own as a meditation on a particular topic. The book covers the breadth of language constructs in pure Python without confusing the reader with the complexities of the broader Python ecosystem. For more seasoned developers the book provides in-depth examples of language constructs they may not have previously encountered, and provides examples of less commonly used language features. It is clear that the author is exceptionally facile with Python, and he uses his professional experience to alert the reader to common subtle bugs and common failure modes. Furthermore, the book does an excellent job of pointing out subtleties between Python 2.X and Python 3.X and could serve as a refresher course as one transitions between variants of Python.”

—Katherine Scott, software lead, Tempo Automation
“This is a great book for both novice and experienced programmers. The code examples and explanations are well thought out and explained concisely and thoroughly.”
—C. Titus Brown, associate professor, UC Davis

“This is an immensely useful resource for advanced Python usage and building cleaner, more maintainable software. Anyone looking to take their Python skills to the next level would benefit from putting the book’s advice into practice.”
—Wes McKinney, creator of pandas; author of Python for Data Analysis; and software engineer at Cloudera
Effective Python
The Effective Software Development Series provides expert advice on all aspects of modern software development. Titles in the series are well written, technically sound, and of lasting value. Each describes the critical things experts always do — or always avoid — to produce outstanding software.

Scott Meyers, author of the best-selling books Effective C++ (now in its third edition), More Effective C++, and Effective STL (all available in both print and electronic versions), conceived of the series and acts as its consulting editor. Authors in the series work with Meyers to create essential reading in a format that is familiar and accessible for software developers of every stripe.

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Effective Python

59 SPECIFIC WAYS TO WRITE BETTER PYTHON

Brett Slatkin

▲Addison-Wesley

Upper Saddle River, NJ • Boston • Indianapolis • San Francisco
New York • Toronto • Montreal • London • Munich • Paris • Madrid
Capetown • Sydney • Tokyo • Singapore • Mexico City
To our family, loved and lost
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The Python programming language has unique strengths and charms that can be hard to grasp. Many programmers familiar with other languages often approach Python from a limited mindset instead of embracing its full expressivity. Some programmers go too far in the other direction, overusing Python features that can cause big problems later.

This book provides insight into the *Pythonic* way of writing programs: the best way to use Python. It builds on a fundamental understanding of the language that I assume you already have. Novice programmers will learn the best practices of Python’s capabilities. Experienced programmers will learn how to embrace the strangeness of a new tool with confidence.

My goal is to prepare you to make a big impact with Python.

**What This Book Covers**

Each chapter in this book contains a broad but related set of items. Feel free to jump between items and follow your interest. Each item contains concise and specific guidance explaining how you can write Python programs more effectively. Items include advice on what to do, what to avoid, how to strike the right balance, and why this is the best choice.

The items in this book are for Python 3 and Python 2 programmers alike (see Item 1: “Know Which Version of Python You’re Using”). Programmers using alternative runtimes like Jython, IronPython, or PyPy should also find the majority of items to be applicable.

**Chapter 1: Pythonic Thinking**

The Python community has come to use the adjective *Pythonic* to describe code that follows a particular style. The idioms of Python
have emerged over time through experience using the language and working with others. This chapter covers the best way to do the most common things in Python.

**Chapter 2: Functions**

Functions in Python have a variety of extra features that make a programmer's life easier. Some are similar to capabilities in other programming languages, but many are unique to Python. This chapter covers how to use functions to clarify intention, promote reuse, and reduce bugs.

**Chapter 3: Classes and Inheritance**

Python is an object-oriented language. Getting things done in Python often requires writing new classes and defining how they interact through their interfaces and hierarchies. This chapter covers how to use classes and inheritance to express your intended behaviors with objects.

**Chapter 4: Metaclasses and Attributes**

Metaclasses and dynamic attributes are powerful Python features. However, they also enable you to implement extremely bizarre and unexpected behaviors. This chapter covers the common idioms for using these mechanisms to ensure that you follow the *rule of least surprise*.

**Chapter 5: Concurrency and Parallelism**

Python makes it easy to write concurrent programs that do many different things seemingly at the same time. Python can also be used to do parallel work through system calls, subprocesses, and C-extensions. This chapter covers how to best utilize Python in these subtly different situations.

**Chapter 6: Built-in Modules**

Python is installed with many of the important modules that you'll need to write programs. These standard packages are so closely intertwined with idiomatic Python that they may as well be part of the language specification. This chapter covers the essential built-in modules.

**Chapter 7: Collaboration**

Collaborating on Python programs requires you to be deliberate about how you write your code. Even if you're working alone, you'll want to understand how to use modules written by others. This chapter covers the standard tools and best practices that enable people to work together on Python programs.
Chapter 8: Production

Python has facilities for adapting to multiple deployment environments. It also has built-in modules that aid in hardening your programs and making them bulletproof. This chapter covers how to use Python to debug, optimize, and test your programs to maximize quality and performance at runtime.

Conventions Used in This Book

Python code snippets in this book are in monospace font and have syntax highlighting. I take some artistic license with the Python style guide to make the code examples better fit the format of a book or to highlight the most important parts. When lines are long, I use ➡ characters to indicate that they wrap. I truncate snippets with ellipses comments (#. . .) to indicate regions where code exists that isn't essential for expressing the point. I've also left out embedded documentation to reduce the size of code examples. I strongly suggest that you don’t do this in your projects; instead, you should follow the style guide (see Item 2: “Follow the PEP 8 Style Guide”) and write documentation (see Item 49: “Write Docstrings for Every Function, Class, and Module”).

Most code snippets in this book are accompanied by the corresponding output from running the code. When I say “output,” I mean console or terminal output: what you see when running the Python program in an interactive interpreter. Output sections are in monospace font and are preceded by a >>> line (the Python interactive prompt). The idea is that you could type the code snippets into a Python shell and reproduce the expected output.

Finally, there are some other sections in monospace font that are not preceded by a >>> line. These represent the output of running programs besides the Python interpreter. These examples often begin with $ characters to indicate that I’m running programs from a command-line shell like Bash.

Where to Get the Code and Errata

It’s useful to view some of the examples in this book as whole programs without interleaved prose. This also gives you a chance to tinker with the code yourself and understand why the program works as described. You can find the source code for all code snippets in this book on the book’s website (http://www.effectivepython.com). Any errors found in the book will have corrections posted on the website.
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This book would not have been possible without the guidance, support, and encouragement from many people in my life.

Thanks to Scott Meyers for the Effective Software Development series. I first read *Effective C++* when I was 15 years old and fell in love with the language. There’s no doubt that Scott’s books led to my academic experience and first job at Google. I’m thrilled to have had the opportunity to write this book.

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The first organizational tool programmers use in Python is the function. As in other programming languages, functions enable you to break large programs into smaller, simpler pieces. They improve readability and make code more approachable. They allow for reuse and refactoring.

Functions in Python have a variety of extra features that make the programmer’s life easier. Some are similar to capabilities in other programming languages, but many are unique to Python. These extras can make a function’s purpose more obvious. They can eliminate noise and clarify the intention of callers. They can significantly reduce subtle bugs that are difficult to find.

**Item 14: Prefer Exceptions to Returning `None`**

When writing utility functions, there’s a draw for Python programmers to give special meaning to the return value of `None`. It seems to makes sense in some cases. For example, say you want a helper function that divides one number by another. In the case of dividing by zero, returning `None` seems natural because the result is undefined.

```python
def divide(a, b):
    try:
        return a / b
    except ZeroDivisionError:
        return None
```

Code using this function can interpret the return value accordingly.

```python
result = divide(x, y)
if result is None:
    print('Invalid inputs')
```
What happens when the numerator is zero? That will cause the return value to also be zero (if the denominator is non-zero). This can cause problems when you evaluate the result in a condition like an if statement. You may accidentally look for any False equivalent value to indicate errors instead of only looking for None (see Item 4: “Write Helper Functions Instead of Complex Expressions” for a similar situation).

```python
x, y = 0, 5
result = divide(x, y)
if not result:
    print('Invalid inputs')  # This is wrong!
```

This is a common mistake in Python code when None has special meaning. This is why returning None from a function is error prone. There are two ways to reduce the chance of such errors.

The first way is to split the return value into a two-tuple. The first part of the tuple indicates that the operation was a success or failure. The second part is the actual result that was computed.

```python
def divide(a, b):
    try:
        return True, a / b
    except ZeroDivisionError:
        return False, None
```

Callers of this function have to unpack the tuple. That forces them to consider the status part of the tuple instead of just looking at the result of division.

```python
success, result = divide(x, y)
if not success:
    print('Invalid inputs')
```

The problem is that callers can easily ignore the first part of the tuple (using the underscore variable name, a Python convention for unused variables). The resulting code doesn't look wrong at first glance. This is as bad as just returning None.

```python
_, result = divide(x, y)
if not result:
    print('Invalid inputs')
```

The second, better way to reduce these errors is to never return None at all. Instead, raise an exception up to the caller and make them deal with it. Here, I turn a ZeroDivisionError into a ValueError to indicate to the caller that the input values are bad:
def divide(a, b):
    try:
        return a / b
    except ZeroDivisionError as e:
        raise ValueError('Invalid inputs') from e

Now the caller should handle the exception for the invalid input case (this behavior should be documented; see Item 49: “Write Docstrings for Every Function, Class, and Module”). The caller no longer requires a condition on the return value of the function. If the function didn’t raise an exception, then the return value must be good. The outcome of exception handling is clear.

x, y = 5, 2
try:
    result = divide(x, y)
except ValueError:
    print('Invalid inputs')
else:
    print('Result is %.1f' % result)

>>> Result is 2.5

Things to Remember

✦ Functions that return None to indicate special meaning are error prone because None and other values (e.g., zero, the empty string) all evaluate to False in conditional expressions.

✦ Raise exceptions to indicate special situations instead of returning None. Expect the calling code to handle exceptions properly when they’re documented.

Item 15: Know How Closures Interact with Variable Scope

Say you want to sort a list of numbers but prioritize one group of numbers to come first. This pattern is useful when you’re rendering a user interface and want important messages or exceptional events to be displayed before everything else.

A common way to do this is to pass a helper function as the key argument to a list’s sort method. The helper’s return value will be used as the value for sorting each item in the list. The helper can check whether the given item is in the important group and can vary the sort key accordingly.
def sort_priority(values, group):
    def helper(x):
        if x in group:
            return (0, x)
        return (1, x)
    values.sort(key=helper)

This function works for simple inputs.

numbers = [8, 3, 1, 2, 5, 4, 7, 6]
group = {2, 3, 5, 7}
sort_priority(numbers, group)
print(numbers)

>>> [2, 3, 5, 7, 1, 4, 6, 8]

There are three reasons why this function operates as expected:

- Python supports closures: functions that refer to variables from the scope in which they were defined. This is why the helper function is able to access the group argument to sort_priority.

- Functions are first-class objects in Python, meaning you can refer to them directly, assign them to variables, pass them as arguments to other functions, compare them in expressions and if statements, etc. This is how the sort method can accept a closure function as the key argument.

- Python has specific rules for comparing tuples. It first compares items in index zero, then index one, then index two, and so on. This is why the return value from the helper closure causes the sort order to have two distinct groups.

It'd be nice if this function returned whether higher-priority items were seen at all so the user interface code can act accordingly. Adding such behavior seems straightforward. There's already a closure function for deciding which group each number is in. Why not also use the closure to flip a flag when high-priority items are seen? Then the function can return the flag value after it's been modified by the closure.

Here, I try to do that in a seemingly obvious way:

def sort_priority2(numbers, group):
    found = False
    def helper(x):
        if x in group:
            found = True  # Seems simple
I can run the function on the same inputs as before.

```python
def sort_priority2(numbers, group):
    found = False  # Scope: 'sort_priority2'
    def helper(x):
        if x in group:
            found = True  # Scope: 'helper' -- Bad!
        return (0, x)
    numbers.sort(key=helper)
    return found

found = sort_priority2(numbers, group)
print('Found:', found)
print(numbers)
```

```bash
>>> Found: False
[2, 3, 5, 7, 1, 4, 6, 8]
```

The sorted results are correct, but the found result is wrong. Items from `group` were definitely found in `numbers`, but the function returned `False`. How could this happen?

When you reference a variable in an expression, the Python interpreter will traverse the scope to resolve the reference in this order:

1. The current function's scope
2. Any enclosing scopes (like other containing functions)
3. The scope of the module that contains the code (also called the `global scope`)
4. The built-in scope (that contains functions like `len` and `str`)

If none of these places have a defined variable with the referenced name, then a `NameError` exception is raised.

Assigning a value to a variable works differently. If the variable is already defined in the current scope, then it will just take on the new value. If the variable doesn't exist in the current scope, then Python treats the assignment as a variable definition. The scope of the newly defined variable is the function that contains the assignment.

This assignment behavior explains the wrong return value of the `sort_priority2` function. The `found` variable is assigned to `True` in the `helper` closure. The closure's assignment is treated as a new variable definition within `helper`, not as an assignment within `sort_priority2`. 
Encountering this problem is sometimes called the *scoping bug* because it can be so surprising to newbies. But this is the intended result. This behavior prevents local variables in a function from polluting the containing module. Otherwise, every assignment within a function would put garbage into the global module scope. Not only would that be noise, but the interplay of the resulting global variables could cause obscure bugs.

**Getting Data Out**

In Python 3, there is special syntax for getting data out of a closure. The `nonlocal` statement is used to indicate that scope traversal should happen upon assignment for a specific variable name. The only limit is that `nonlocal` won’t traverse up to the module-level scope (to avoid polluting globals).

Here, I define the same function again using `nonlocal`:

```python
def sort_priority3(numbers, group):
    found = False
    def helper(x):
        nonlocal found
        if x in group:
            found = True
        return (0, x)
    return (1, x)
    numbers.sort(key=helper)
    return found
```

The `nonlocal` statement makes it clear when data is being assigned out of a closure into another scope. It’s complementary to the `global` statement, which indicates that a variable’s assignment should go directly into the module scope.

However, much like the anti-pattern of global variables, I’d caution against using `nonlocal` for anything beyond simple functions. The side effects of `nonlocal` can be hard to follow. It’s especially hard to understand in long functions where the `nonlocal` statements and assignments to associated variables are far apart.

When your usage of `nonlocal` starts getting complicated, it’s better to wrap your state in a helper class. Here, I define a class that achieves the same result as the `nonlocal` approach. It’s a little
longer, but is much easier to read (see Item 23: “Accept Functions for Simple Interfaces Instead of Classes” for details on the __call__ special method).

class Sorter(object):
    def __init__(self, group):
        self.group = group
        self.found = False

    def __call__(self, x):
        if x in self.group:
            self.found = True
            return (0, x)
        return (1, x)

sorter = Sorter(group)
nnumbers.sort(key=sorter)
assert sorter.found is True

Scope in Python 2

Unfortunately, Python 2 doesn’t support the nonlocal keyword. In order to get similar behavior, you need to use a work-around that takes advantage of Python’s scoping rules. This approach isn’t pretty, but it’s the common Python idiom.

# Python 2
def sort_priority(numbers, group):
    found = [False]
    def helper(x):
        if x in group:
            found[0] = True
            return (0, x)
        return (1, x)
    numbers.sort(key=helper)
    return found[0]

As explained above, Python will traverse up the scope where the found variable is referenced to resolve its current value. The trick is that the value for found is a list, which is mutable. This means that once retrieved, the closure can modify the state of found to send data out of the inner scope (with found[0] = True).

This approach also works when the variable used to traverse the scope is a dictionary, a set, or an instance of a class you’ve defined.
Things to Remember

✦ Closure functions can refer to variables from any of the scopes in which they were defined.
✦ By default, closures can't affect enclosing scopes by assigning variables.
✦ In Python 3, use the nonlocal statement to indicate when a closure can modify a variable in its enclosing scopes.
✦ In Python 2, use a mutable value (like a single-item list) to work around the lack of the nonlocal statement.
✦ Avoid using nonlocal statements for anything beyond simple functions.

Item 16: Consider Generators Instead of Returning Lists

The simplest choice for functions that produce a sequence of results is to return a list of items. For example, say you want to find the index of every word in a string. Here, I accumulate results in a list using the append method and return it at the end of the function:

```python
def index_words(text):
    result = []
    if text:
        result.append(0)
        for index, letter in enumerate(text):
            if letter == ' ':
                result.append(index + 1)
    return result
```

This works as expected for some sample input.

```python
address = 'Four score and seven years ago...'
result = index_words(address)
print(result[:3])
```

```python
>>> [0, 5, 11]
```

There are two problems with the index_words function.

The first problem is that the code is a bit dense and noisy. Each time a new result is found, I call the append method. The method call's bulk (result.append) deemphasizes the value being added to the list (index + 1). There is one line for creating the result list and another
for returning it. While the function body contains ~130 characters (without whitespace), only ~75 characters are important.

A better way to write this function is using a generator. Generators are functions that use yield expressions. When called, generator functions do not actually run but instead immediately return an iterator. With each call to the next built-in function, the iterator will advance the generator to its next yield expression. Each value passed to yield by the generator will be returned by the iterator to the caller.

Here, I define a generator function that produces the same results as before:

```python
def index_words_iter(text):
    if text:
        yield 0
    for index, letter in enumerate(text):
        if letter == ' ':
            yield index + 1
```

It's significantly easier to read because all interactions with the result list have been eliminated. Results are passed to yield expressions instead. The iterator returned by the generator call can easily be converted to a list by passing it to the list built-in function (see Item 9: “Consider Generator Expressions for Large Comprehensions” for how this works).

```python
result = list(index_words_iter(address))
```

The second problem with `index_words` is that it requires all results to be stored in the list before being returned. For huge inputs, this can cause your program to run out of memory and crash. In contrast, a generator version of this function can easily be adapted to take inputs of arbitrary length.

Here, I define a generator that streams input from a file one line at a time and yields outputs one word at a time. The working memory for this function is bounded to the maximum length of one line of input.

```python
def index_file(handle):
    offset = 0
    for line in handle:
        if line:
            yield offset
        for letter in line:
            offset += 1
            if letter == ' ':
                yield offset
```
Running the generator produces the same results.

```python
with open('/tmp/address.txt', 'r') as f:
    it = index_file(f)
    results = islice(it, 0, 3)
    print(list(results))

>>> [0, 5, 11]
```

The only gotcha of defining generators like this is that the callers must be aware that the iterators returned are stateful and can't be reused (see Item 17: “Be Defensive When Iterating Over Arguments”).

**Things to Remember**

✦ Using generators can be clearer than the alternative of returning lists of accumulated results.

✦ The iterator returned by a generator produces the set of values passed to `yield` expressions within the generator function's body.

✦ Generators can produce a sequence of outputs for arbitrarily large inputs because their working memory doesn't include all inputs and outputs.

**Item 17: Be Defensive When Iterating Over Arguments**

When a function takes a list of objects as a parameter, it's often important to iterate over that list multiple times. For example, say you want to analyze tourism numbers for the U.S. state of Texas. Imagine the data set is the number of visitors to each city (in millions per year). You'd like to figure out what percentage of overall tourism each city receives.

To do this you need a normalization function. It sums the inputs to determine the total number of tourists per year. Then it divides each city's individual visitor count by the total to find that city's contribution to the whole.

```python
def normalize(numbers):
    total = sum(numbers)
    result = []
    for value in numbers:
        percent = 100 * value / total
        result.append(percent)
    return result
```
This function works when given a list of visits.

```python
visits = [15, 35, 80]
percentages = normalize(visits)
print(percentages)
```

```
[11.538461538461538, 26.923076923076923, 61.53846153846154]
```

To scale this up, I need to read the data from a file that contains every city in all of Texas. I define a generator to do this because then I can reuse the same function later when I want to compute tourism numbers for the whole world, a much larger data set (see Item 16: “Consider Generators Instead of Returning Lists”).

```python
def read_visits(data_path):
    with open(data_path) as f:
        for line in f:
            yield int(line)
```

Surprisingly, calling `normalize` on the generator’s return value produces no results.

```python
it = read_visits('/tmp/my_numbers.txt')
percentages = normalize(it)
print(percentages)
```

```
[]
```

The cause of this behavior is that an iterator only produces its results a single time. If you iterate over an iterator or generator that has already raised a `StopIteration` exception, you won’t get any results the second time around.

```python
it = read_visits('/tmp/my_numbers.txt')
print(list(it))
print(list(it))  # Already exhausted
```

```
[15, 35, 80]
[]
```

What’s confusing is that you also won’t get any errors when you iterate over an already exhausted iterator. `for` loops, the `list` constructor, and many other functions throughout the Python standard library expect the `StopIteration` exception to be raised during normal operation. These functions can’t tell the difference between an iterator that has no output and an iterator that had output and is now exhausted.
To solve this problem, you can explicitly exhaust an input iterator and keep a copy of its entire contents in a list. You can then iterate over the list version of the data as many times as you need to. Here's the same function as before, but it defensively copies the input iterator:

```python
def normalize_copy(numbers):
    numbers = list(numbers)  # Copy the iterator
    total = sum(numbers)
    result = []
    for value in numbers:
        percent = 100 * value / total
        result.append(percent)
    return result
```

Now the function works correctly on a generator's return value.

```python
it = read_visits('/tmp/my_numbers.txt')
percentages = normalize_copy(it)
print(percentages)
```

```
[11.538461538461538, 26.923076923076923, 61.53846153846154]
```

The problem with this approach is the copy of the input iterator's contents could be large. Copying the iterator could cause your program to run out of memory and crash. One way around this is to accept a function that returns a new iterator each time it's called.

```python
def normalize_func(get_iter):
    total = sum(get_iter())  # New iterator
    result = []
    for value in get_iter():  # New iterator
        percent = 100 * value / total
        result.append(percent)
    return result
```

To use normalize_func, you can pass in a lambda expression that calls the generator and produces a new iterator each time.

```python
percentages = normalize_func(lambda: read_visits(path))
```

Though it works, having to pass a lambda function like this is clumsy. The better way to achieve the same result is to provide a new container class that implements the iterator protocol.

The iterator protocol is how Python for loops and related expressions traverse the contents of a container type. When Python sees a
statement like for x in foo it will actually call iter(foo). The iter
built-in function calls the foo.__iter__ special method in turn. The
__iter__ method must return an iterator object (which itself imple-
ments the __next__ special method). Then the for loop repeat-
edly calls the next built-in function on the iterator object until it’s
exhausted (and raises a StopIteration exception).

It sounds complicated, but practically speaking you can achieve all of
this behavior for your classes by implementing the __iter__ method
as a generator. Here, I define an iterable container class that reads
the files containing tourism data:

class ReadVisits(object):
    def __init__(self, data_path):
        self.data_path = data_path

    def __iter__(self):
        with open(self.data_path) as f:
            for line in f:
                yield int(line)

This new container type works correctly when passed to the original
function without any modifications.

visits = ReadVisits(path)
percentages = normalize(visits)
print(percentages)

>>> [11.538461538461538, 26.923076923076923, 61.53846153846154]

This works because the sum method in normalize will call
ReadVisits.__iter__ to allocate a new iterator object. The for loop to
normalize the numbers will also call __iter__ to allocate a second
iterator object. Each of those iterators will be advanced and exhausted
independently, ensuring that each unique iteration sees all of the
input data values. The only downside of this approach is that it reads
the input data multiple times.

Now that you know how containers like ReadVisits work, you can
write your functions to ensure that parameters aren’t just iterators.
The protocol states that when an iterator is passed to the iter built-in
function, iter will return the iterator itself. In contrast, when a con-
tainer type is passed to iter, a new iterator object will be returned
each time. Thus, you can test an input value for this behavior and
raise a TypeError to reject iterators.
def normalize_defensive(numbers):
    if iter(numbers) is iter(numbers):  # An iterator -- bad!
        raise TypeError('Must supply a container')
    total = sum(numbers)
    result = []
    for value in numbers:
        percent = 100 * value / total
        result.append(percent)
    return result

This is ideal if you don’t want to copy the full input iterator like normalize_copy above, but you also need to iterate over the input data multiple times. This function works as expected for list and ReadVisits inputs because they are containers. It will work for any type of container that follows the iterator protocol.

visits = [15, 35, 80]
normalize_defensive(visits)  # No error
visits = ReadVisits(path)
normalize_defensive(visits)  # No error

The function will raise an exception if the input is iterable but not a container.

it = iter(visits)
normalize_defensive(it)

>>> TypeError: Must supply a container

**Things to Remember**

✦ Beware of functions that iterate over input arguments multiple times. If these arguments are iterators, you may see strange behavior and missing values.

✦ Python’s iterator protocol defines how containers and iterators interact with the `iter` and `next` built-in functions, for loops, and related expressions.

✦ You can easily define your own iterable container type by implementing the `__iter__` method as a generator.

✦ You can detect that a value is an iterator (instead of a container) if calling `iter` on it twice produces the same result, which can then be progressed with the `next` built-in function.
Item 18: Reduce Visual Noise with Variable Positional Arguments

Accepting optional positional arguments (often called *star args* in reference to the conventional name for the parameter, *args) can make a function call more clear and remove visual noise.

For example, say you want to log some debug information. With a fixed number of arguments, you would need a function that takes a message and a list of values.

```python
def log(message, values):
    if not values:
        print(message)
    else:
        values_str = ', '.join(str(x) for x in values)
        print('%s: %s' % (message, values_str))

log('My numbers are', [1, 2])
log('Hi there', [])
```

Having to pass an empty list when you have no values to log is cumbersome and noisy. It’d be better to leave out the second argument entirely. You can do this in Python by prefixing the last positional parameter name with *. The first parameter for the log message is required, whereas any number of subsequent positional arguments are optional. The function body doesn’t need to change, only the callers do.

```python
def log(message, *values):
    if not values:
        print(message)
    else:
        values_str = ', '.join(str(x) for x in values)
        print('%s: %s' % (message, values_str))

log('My numbers are', 1, 2)
log('Hi there')  # Much better
```

```bash
>>> My numbers are: 1, 2
Hi there
```

```bash
>>> My numbers are: 1, 2
Hi there
```
If you already have a list and want to call a variable argument function like \( \log \), you can do this by using the \(*\) operator. This instructs Python to pass items from the sequence as positional arguments.

```python
favorites = [7, 33, 99]
log('Favorite colors', *favorites)
```

```
Favorite colors: 7, 33, 99
```

There are two problems with accepting a variable number of positional arguments.

The first issue is that the variable arguments are always turned into a tuple before they are passed to your function. This means that if the caller of your function uses the \(*\) operator on a generator, it will be iterated until it’s exhausted. The resulting tuple will include every value from the generator, which could consume a lot of memory and cause your program to crash.

```python
def my_generator():
    for i in range(10):
        yield i

def my_func(*args):
    print(args)

it = my_generator()
my_func(*it)
```

```
(0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)
```

Functions that accept \(*args\) are best for situations where you know the number of inputs in the argument list will be reasonably small. It’s ideal for function calls that pass many literals or variable names together. It’s primarily for the convenience of the programmer and the readability of the code.

The second issue with \(*args\) is that you can’t add new positional arguments to your function in the future without migrating every caller. If you try to add a positional argument in the front of the argument list, existing callers will subtly break if they aren’t updated.

```python
def log(sequence, message, *values):
    if not values:
        print('\\%s: %s\\' % (sequence, message))
    else:
        values_str = ', '.join(str(x) for x in values)
        print('\\%s: %s: %s\\' % (sequence, message, values_str))
```
Item 19: Provide Optional Behavior with Keyword Arguments

Like most other programming languages, calling a function in Python allows for passing arguments by position.

```python
def remainder(number, divisor):
    return number % divisor

assert remainder(20, 7) == 6
```

All positional arguments to Python functions can also be passed by keyword, where the name of the argument is used in an assignment within the parentheses of a function call. The keyword arguments can be passed in any order as long as all of the required positional arguments are specified. You can mix and match keyword and positional arguments. These calls are equivalent:

```python
remainder(20, 7)
remainder(20, divisor=7)
remainder(number=20, divisor=7)
remainder(divisor=7, number=20)
```
Positional arguments must be specified before keyword arguments.

```python
geremainder(number=20, 7)
```

>>> SyntaxError: non-keyword arg after keyword arg

Each argument can only be specified once.

```python
geremainder(20, number=7)
```

>>> TypeError: remainder() got multiple values for argument 'number'

The flexibility of keyword arguments provides three significant benefits.

The first advantage is that keyword arguments make the function call clearer to new readers of the code. With the call `remainder(20, 7)`, it’s not evident which argument is the number and which is the divisor without looking at the implementation of the remainder method. In the call with keyword arguments, `number=20` and `divisor=7` make it immediately obvious which parameter is being used for each purpose.

The second impact of keyword arguments is that they can have default values specified in the function definition. This allows a function to provide additional capabilities when you need them but lets you accept the default behavior most of the time. This can eliminate repetitive code and reduce noise.

For example, say you want to compute the rate of fluid flowing into a vat. If the vat is also on a scale, then you could use the difference between two weight measurements at two different times to determine the flow rate.

```python
def flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff):
    return weight_diff / time_diff

weight_diff = 0.5
time_diff = 3
flow = flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff)
print('%.3f kg per second' % flow)
```

```plaintext
>>> 0.167 kg per second
```

In the typical case, it’s useful to know the flow rate in kilograms per second. Other times, it’d be helpful to use the last sensor measurements to approximate larger time scales, like hours or days. You can
provide this behavior in the same function by adding an argument for the time period scaling factor.

```python
def flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff, period):
    return (weight_diff / time_diff) * period
```

The problem is that now you need to specify the period argument every time you call the function, even in the common case of flow rate per second (where the period is 1).

```python
flow_per_second = flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff, 1)
```

To make this less noisy, I can give the period argument a default value.

```python
def flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff, period=1):
    return (weight_diff / time_diff) * period
```

The period argument is now optional.

```python
flow_per_second = flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff)
flow_per_hour = flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff, period=3600)
```

This works well for simple default values (it gets tricky for complex default values—see Item 20: “Use None and Docstrings to Specify Dynamic Default Arguments”).

The third reason to use keyword arguments is that they provide a powerful way to extend a function’s parameters while remaining backwards compatible with existing callers. This lets you provide additional functionality without having to migrate a lot of code, reducing the chance of introducing bugs.

For example, say you want to extend the `flow_rate` function above to calculate flow rates in weight units besides kilograms. You can do this by adding a new optional parameter that provides a conversion rate to your preferred measurement units.

```python
def flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff, period=1, units_per_kg=1):
    return ((weight_diff / units_per_kg) / time_diff) * period
```

The default argument value for `units_per_kg` is 1, which makes the returned weight units remain as kilograms. This means that all existing callers will see no change in behavior. New callers to `flow_rate` can specify the new keyword argument to see the new behavior.

```python
pounds_per_hour = flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff, period=3600, units_per_kg=2.2)
```

The only problem with this approach is that optional keyword arguments like period and units_per_kg may still be specified as positional arguments.
pounds_per_hour = flow_rate(weight_diff, time_diff, 3600, 2.2)

Supplying optional arguments positionally can be confusing because it isn’t clear what the values 3600 and 2.2 correspond to. The best practice is to always specify optional arguments using the keyword names and never pass them as positional arguments.

**Note**

Backwards compatibility using optional keyword arguments like this is crucial for functions that accept *args (see Item 18: “Reduce Visual Noise with Variable Positional Arguments”). But an even better practice is to use keyword-only arguments (see Item 21: “Enforce Clarity with Keyword-Only Arguments”).

**Things to Remember**

✦ Function arguments can be specified by position or by keyword.

✦ Keywords make it clear what the purpose of each argument is when it would be confusing with only positional arguments.

✦ Keyword arguments with default values make it easy to add new behaviors to a function, especially when the function has existing callers.

✦ Optional keyword arguments should always be passed by keyword instead of by position.

**Item 20: Use None and Docstrings to Specify Dynamic Default Arguments**

Sometimes you need to use a non-static type as a keyword argument’s default value. For example, say you want to print logging messages that are marked with the time of the logged event. In the default case, you want the message to include the time when the function was called. You might try the following approach, assuming the default arguments are reevaluated each time the function is called.

```python
def log(message, when=datetime.now()):
    print('s: %s' % (when, message))

log('Hi there!')
sleep(0.1)
log('Hi again!')
```

```plaintext
```
The timestamps are the same because `datetime.now` is only executed a single time: when the function is defined. Default argument values are evaluated only once per module load, which usually happens when a program starts up. After the module containing this code is loaded, the `datetime.now` default argument will never be evaluated again.

The convention for achieving the desired result in Python is to provide a default value of `None` and to document the actual behavior in the docstring (see Item 49: “Write Docstrings for Every Function, Class, and Module”). When your code sees an argument value of `None`, you allocate the default value accordingly.

```python
def log(message, when=None):
    """Log a message with a timestamp."
    
    Args:
    message: Message to print.
    when: datetime of when the message occurred.
        Defaults to the present time.
    """
    when = datetime.now() if when is None else when
    print('%s: %s' % (when, message))
```

Now the timestamps will be different.

```python
log('Hi there!')
sleep(0.1)
log('Hi again!')
```

```plaintext
```

Using `None` for default argument values is especially important when the arguments are mutable. For example, say you want to load a value encoded as JSON data. If decoding the data fails, you want an empty dictionary to be returned by default. You might try this approach.

```python
def decode(data, default={}):
    try:
        return json.loads(data)
    except ValueError:
        return default
```

The problem here is the same as the `datetime.now` example above. The dictionary specified for `default` will be shared by all calls to `decode` because default argument values are only evaluated once (at module load time). This can cause extremely surprising behavior.
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foo = decode('bad data')
foo['stuff'] = 5
bar = decode('also bad')
bar['meep'] = 1
print('Foo:', foo)
print('Bar:', bar)

>>> Foo: {'stuff': 5, 'meep': 1}
Bar: {'stuff': 5, 'meep': 1}

You'd expect two different dictionaries, each with a single key and value. But modifying one seems to also modify the other. The culprit is that foo and bar are both equal to the default parameter. They are the same dictionary object.

assert foo is bar

The fix is to set the keyword argument default value to None and then document the behavior in the function's docstring.

def decode(data, default=None):
    """Load JSON data from a string.

    Args:
    data: JSON data to decode.
    default: Value to return if decoding fails.
    Defaults to an empty dictionary.
    ""
    if default is None:
        default = {}
    try:
        return json.loads(data)
    except ValueError:
        return default

Now, running the same test code as before produces the expected result.

foo = decode('bad data')
foo['stuff'] = 5
bar = decode('also bad')
bar['meep'] = 1
print('Foo:', foo)
print('Bar:', bar)

>>> Foo: {'stuff': 5}
Bar: {'meep': 1}
**Item 21: Enforce Clarity with Keyword-Only Arguments**

Passing arguments by keyword is a powerful feature of Python functions (see Item 19: “Provide Optional Behavior with Keyword Arguments”). The flexibility of keyword arguments enables you to write code that will be clear for your use cases.

For example, say you want to divide one number by another but be very careful about special cases. Sometimes you want to ignore `ZeroDivisionError` exceptions and return infinity instead. Other times, you want to ignore `OverflowError` exceptions and return zero instead.

```python
def safe_division(number, divisor, ignore_overflow, ignore_zero_division):
    try:
        return number / divisor
    except OverflowError:
        if ignore_overflow:
            return 0
        else:
            raise
    except ZeroDivisionError:
        if ignore_zero_division:
            return float('inf')
        else:
            raise
```

Using this function is straightforward. This call will ignore the float overflow from division and will return zero.

```python
result = safe_division(1, 10**500, True, False)
print(result)
```

```python
>>> 0.0
```
This call will ignore the error from dividing by zero and will return infinity.

```python
result = safe_division(1, 0, False, True)
print(result)
```

```
>>> inf
```

The problem is that it's easy to confuse the position of the two Boolean arguments that control the exception-ignoring behavior. This can easily cause bugs that are hard to track down. One way to improve the readability of this code is to use keyword arguments. By default, the function can be overly cautious and can always re-raise exceptions.

```python
def safe_division_b(number, divisor, ignore_overflow=False, ignore_zero_division=False):
    # ...
```

Then callers can use keyword arguments to specify which of the ignore flags they want to flip for specific operations, overriding the default behavior.

```python
safe_division_b(1, 10**500, ignore_overflow=True)
safe_division_b(1, 0, ignore_zero_division=True)
```

The problem is, since these keyword arguments are optional behavior, there's nothing forcing callers of your functions to use keyword arguments for clarity. Even with the new definition of `safe_division_b`, you can still call it the old way with positional arguments.

```python
safe_division_b(1, 10**500, True, False)
```

With complex functions like this, it's better to require that callers are clear about their intentions. In Python 3, you can demand clarity by defining your functions with keyword-only arguments. These arguments can only be supplied by keyword, never by position.

Here, I redefine the `safe_division` function to accept keyword-only arguments. The * symbol in the argument list indicates the end of positional arguments and the beginning of keyword-only arguments.

```python
def safe_division_c(number, divisor, *, ignore_overflow=False, ignore_zero_division=False):
    # ...
```
Now, calling the function with positional arguments for the keyword arguments won't work.

```python
safe_division_c(1, 10**500, True, False)
```

```
>>> TypeError: safe_division_c() takes 2 positional arguments but 4 were given
```

Keyword arguments and their default values work as expected.

```python
safe_division_c(1, 0, ignore_zero_division=True)  # OK
try:
    safe_division_c(1, 0)
except ZeroDivisionError:
    pass  # Expected
```

### Keyword-Only Arguments in Python 2

Unfortunately, Python 2 doesn't have explicit syntax for specifying keyword-only arguments like Python 3. But you can achieve the same behavior of raising `TypeError` for invalid function calls by using the `**` operator in argument lists. The `**` operator is similar to the `*` operator (see Item 18: “Reduce Visual Noise with Variable Positional Arguments”), except that instead of accepting a variable number of positional arguments, it accepts any number of keyword arguments, even when they're not defined.

```python
# Python 2
def print_args(*args, **kwargs):
    print 'Positional:', args
    print 'Keyword:   ', kwargs

print_args(1, 2, foo='bar', stuff='meep')
```

```
>>> Positional: (1, 2)
Keyword:   {'foo': 'bar', 'stuff': 'meep'}
```

To make `safe_division` take keyword-only arguments in Python 2, you have the function accept `**kwargs`. Then you pop keyword arguments that you expect out of the `kwargs` dictionary, using the `pop` method's second argument to specify the default value when the key is missing. Finally, you make sure there are no more keyword arguments left in `kwargs` to prevent callers from supplying arguments that are invalid.
# Python 2

def safe_division_d(number, divisor, **kwargs):
    ignore_overflow = kwargs.pop('ignore_overflow', False)
    ignore_zero_div = kwargs.pop('ignore_zero_division', False)
    if kwargs:
        raise TypeError('Unexpected **kwargs: %r' % kwargs)
    # ...

Now, you can call the function with or without keyword arguments.

safe_division_d(1, 10)
safe_division_d(1, 0, ignore_zero_division=True)
safe_division_d(1, 10**500, ignore_overflow=True)

Trying to pass keyword-only arguments by position won't work, just like in Python 3.

safe_division_d(1, 0, False, True)

>>> TypeError: safe_division_d() takes 2 positional arguments but 4 were given

Trying to pass unexpected keyword arguments also won't work.

safe_division_d(0, 0, unexpected=True)

>>> TypeError: Unexpected **kwargs: {'unexpected': True}

**Things to Remember**

✦ Keyword arguments make the intention of a function call more clear.

✦ Use keyword-only arguments to force callers to supply keyword arguments for potentially confusing functions, especially those that accept multiple Boolean flags.

✦ Python 3 supports explicit syntax for keyword-only arguments in functions.

✦ Python 2 can emulate keyword-only arguments for functions by using **kwargs and manually raising TypeError exceptions.
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