COMP1730/COMP6730
Programming for Scientists

Functions, part 2

Announcements

* Homework 4 marking in the labs next week.
* You must attend your lab group unless you have made prior arrangements with the convener.

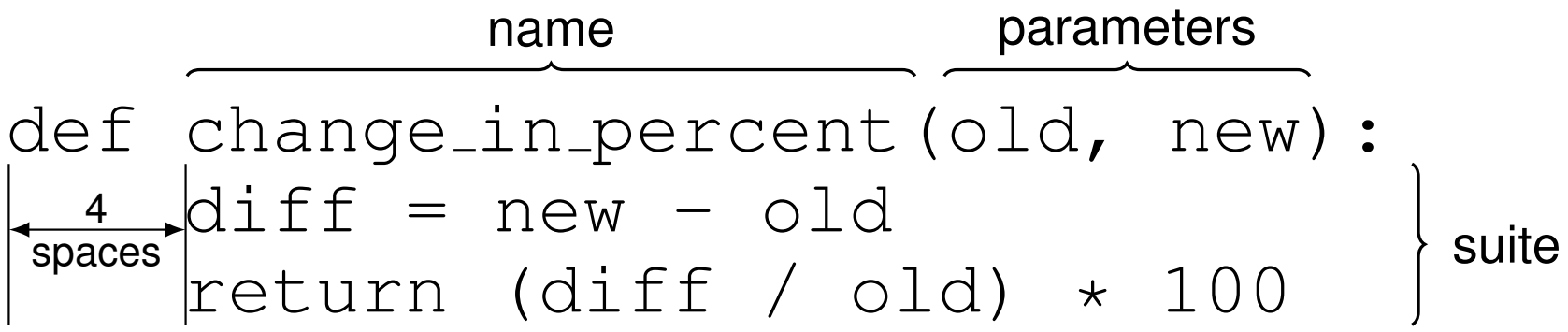
Lecture outline

* Recap of functions.
* Namespaces & references.

Functions (recap)

* A *function* is a piece of code that can be *called* by its name.
* Why use functions?
  - **Abstraction**: To use a function, we only need to know *what* it does, *not how*.
  - Readability.
  - Divide and conquer – break a complex problem into simpler problems.
  - A function is a logical unit of testing.
  - Reuse: Write once, use many times (and by many).

Function definition



* The function suite is defined by indentation.
* Function *parameters* are variables local to the function suite; their values are set when the function is called.
* The `def` statement only *defines* the function – it does not execute the function.

Function call

* To call a function, write its name followed by its *arguments* in parentheses:

```
change_in_percent(315, 435)
```

* Order of evaluation: The argument expressions are evaluated left-to-right, and their values are assigned to the parameters; then the function suite is executed.
* `return` *`expression`* causes the function call to end, and return the value of the expression.

Functions without return

* A function call is an expression: its value is the value `return`'d by the function.
* In python, functions always return a value: If execution reaches the end of a function suite without executing a `return` statement, the return value is the special value `None` of type `NoneType`.
* Note: `None`-values are not printed in the interactive shell (unless explicitly with `print`).

Namespaces

Namespaces

* Assignment associates a (variable) name with a reference to a value.
  - This association is stored in a *namespace* (sometimes also called a "*frame*").
* Whenever a function is called, a new *local namespace* is created.
* Assignments to variables (including parameters) during execution of the function are done in the local namespace.
* The local namespace disappears when the function call ends.

Scope

* The *scope* of a variable is “the set of program statements over which a variable exists (i.e., can be referred to)”.
  - In other words, the set of program statements over which the namespace that the variable is defined in persists.
* Because there are several namespaces, there can be *different variables with the same name in different scopes*.

```
def f(x):
    y = x ** 2
    return y - 1

x = 1
y = f(x + 1)
```

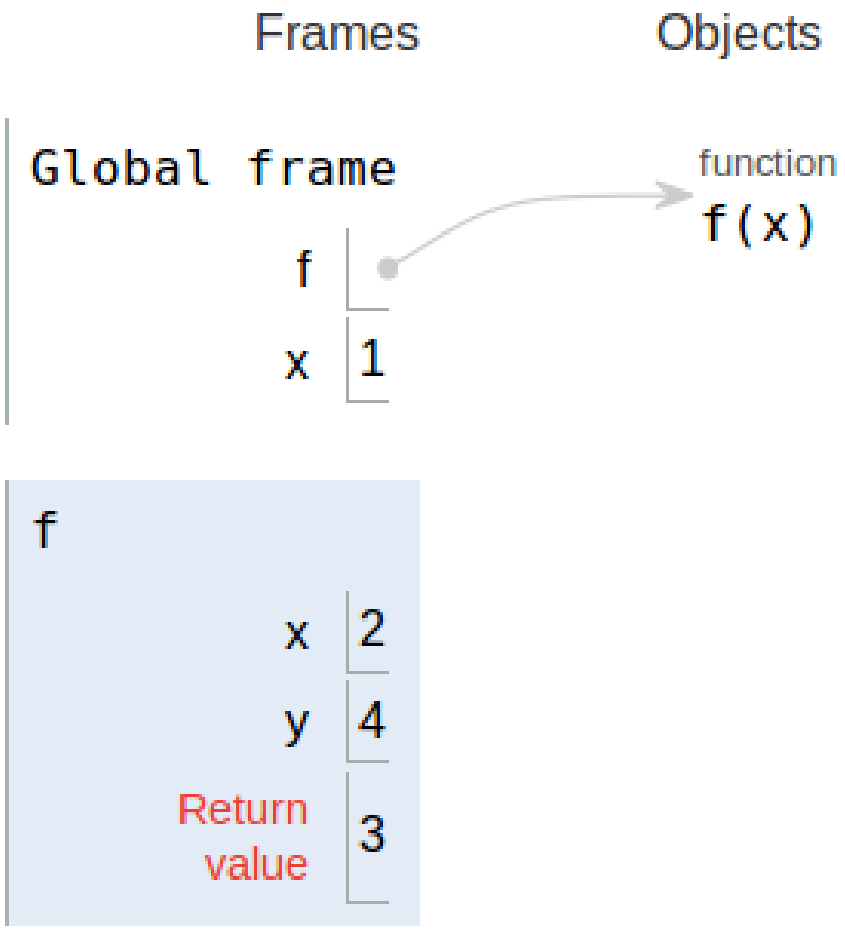


Image from `pythontutor.com`

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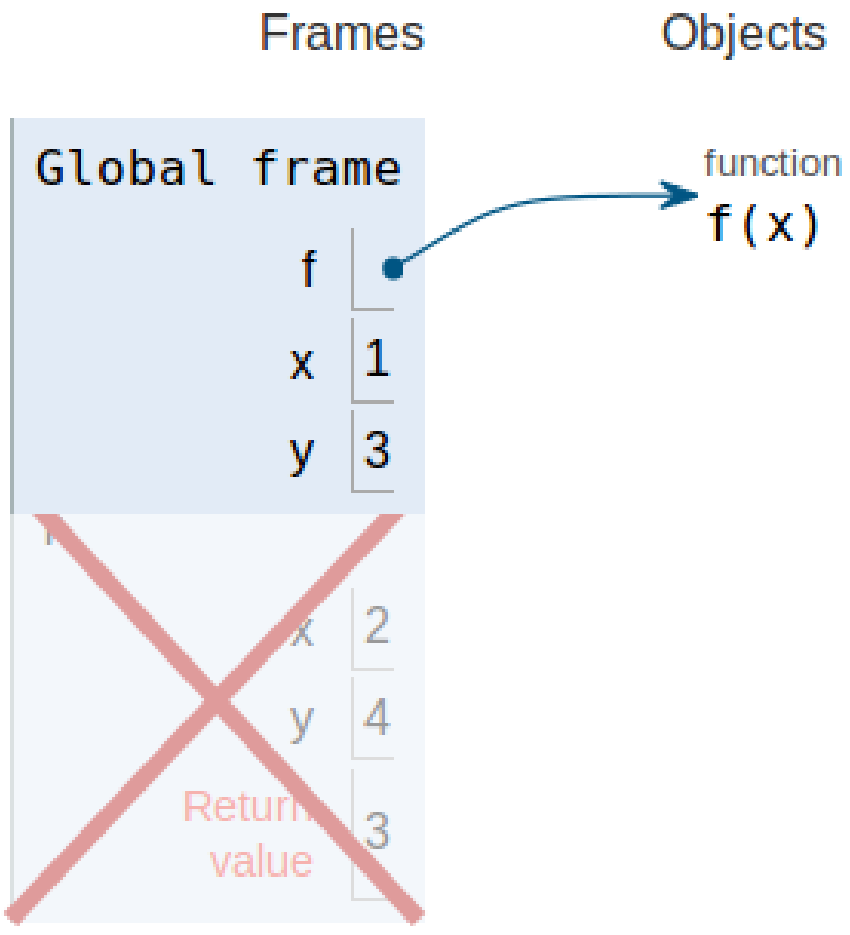

Image based on `pythontutor.com`

The local assignment rule

* python considers a variable that is assigned **anywhere** in the function suite to be a "*local variable*" (this includes parameters).
* When a non-local variable is evaluated, its value is taken from the (enclosing) global namespace.
* When a local variable is evaluated, only the local namespace is checked.
  - If the variable is not defined there, python raises an `UnboundLocalError`.
* The rule considers only *variable assignment*.

```
def f(x):
    return x ** y

>>> y = 2
>>> f(2)
4
```

```
def f(x):
    if y < 1:
        y = 1
    return x ** y

>>> y = 2
>>> f(2)
UnboundLocalError:
 local variable 'y'
 referenced before
 assignment
```

* Modifying is not assignment!
  - Assignment changes/creates the association between a name and a reference (in the current namespace).
  - A modifying operation on a mutable object – including index and slice assignment – does not change any name–value association.

```
def f(x):
    y = x ** 2
    f_list.append([x,y])
    return y

>>> f_list = []
>>> f(2)
4
>>> f(3)
9
>>> f_list
[[2, 4], [3, 9]]
```

Argument values are references

* When a function is called, its parameters are assigned *references* to the argument values.
  - If an argument value refers to a mutable object (for example, a list), modifications to this object made in the function are visible outside the function's scope.

```
def f(ns):
    total = 0
    while len(ns) > 0:
        next = ns.pop(0)
        total = total + next
    return total

>>> a_list = [1,2,3]
>>> f(a_list)
6
>>> a_list
[]
```

```
def f(ns):
    total = 0
    while len(ns) > 0:
        next = ns.pop(0)
        total = total + next
    return total

>>> a_list = [1,2,3]
>>> l_sum = f(a_list)
```

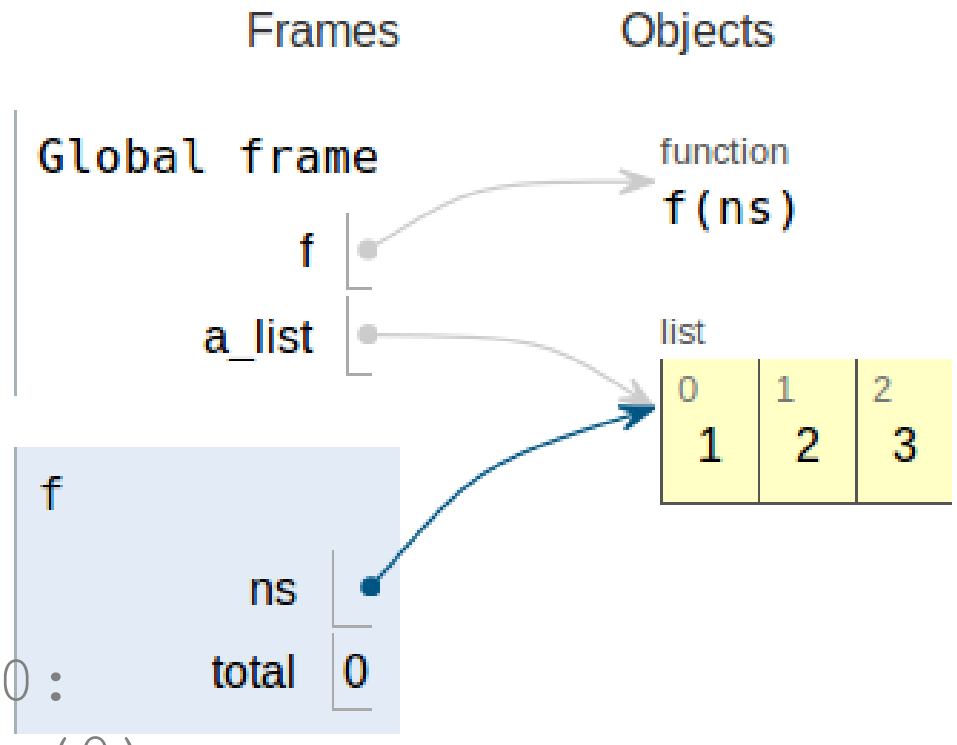

Image from pythontutor.com

Other namespaces

* python's built-in functions are defined in a separate namespace.
* Imported modules are executed in their own namespace.
  - Names in a module namespace are accessed by prefixing the name of the module.
* User-defined classes and objects (not covered in this course) also have their own namespace
* Assignments (and `def`s) made outside a function call are stored in the *global* namespace.

Searching for variables

* When evaluating a variable python checks namespaces in a specific order LEGB.
  - Local - python checks in the local namespace (i.e. within the function definition).
  - Enclosing - within a class definition or an enclosing function definition.
  - Global - within the global namespace.
  - Built-ins - anything built into python.
* Python uses the first version of the variable it finds.
* If none of the namespaces contain the variable, python raises a `NameError`.

Why have namespaces?

* Why have namespaces at all, why not just have everything global?
* Namespaces are about organisation and access control.
* Like most aspects of code quality, they become more important the larger the project.
* Place limitations on the life of a variable and where it can be changed.
* If anyone can modify any variable from anywhere in the project, and your project contains 2 million lines of code, how can you tell where (and why) a value was changed?

Guidelines for good functions

* Within a function, *access only local variables*.
  - Use parameters for all inputs to the function.
  - Return all function outputs (for multiple outputs, return a tuple or list).
  - ...except if the *specific purpose* of the function is to send output elsewhere (e.g., print).
* Don't modify mutable argument values, unless the *specific purpose* of the function is to do that.
* **Rule #4**: No rule should be followed off a cliff.