Regular expressions
Class outline:

- Declarative languages
- Regular expression syntax
- Regular expressions in Python
- Ambiguous regular expressions
Declarative languages
Declarative programming

In **imperative** languages:

- A "program" is a description of computational processes
- The interpreter carries out execution/evaluation rules

In **declarative** languages:

- A "program" is a description of the desired result
- The interpreter figures out how to generate the result

**Examples:**

- Regular expressions: `Good (?:\s*morning\|\s*evening)`
- Backus-Naur Form:
  ```
  ?calc_expr: NUMBER | calc_op
  calc_op: "(" OPERATOR calc_expr* ")"
  OPERATOR: "+" | "-" | "\*" | "/"
  ```
- SQL: `select max(longitude) from cities where longitude >= 115`
Domain-specific languages

Many declarative languages are **domain-specific**: they are designed to tackle problems in a particular domain, instead of being general purpose multi-domain programming languages.

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<th>Domain</th>
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<td>Pattern-matching strings</td>
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<td>Backus-Naur Form</td>
<td>Parsing strings into parse trees</td>
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<td>SQL</td>
<td>Querying and modifying database tables</td>
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<td>HTML</td>
<td>Describing the semantic structure of webpage content</td>
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<td>CSS</td>
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<td>Prolog</td>
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Regular expressions
Pattern matching

Pattern matching in strings is a common problem in computer programming.

An imperative approach:

```python
def is_email_address(str):
    parts = str.split('@')
    if len(parts) != 2:
        return False
    domain_parts = parts[1].split('.
    return len(domain_parts) >= 2 and len(domain_parts[-1]) == 3
```
Pattern matching

Pattern matching in strings is a common problem in computer programming.

An imperative approach:

```python
def is_email_address(str):
    parts = str.split('@')
    if len(parts) != 2:
        return False
    domain_parts = parts[1].split('.
return len(domain_parts) >= 2 and len(domain_parts[-1]) == 3
```

An equivalent regular expression:

```regex
(.+@(.+))\.(.{3})
```

With regular expressions, a programmer can just describe the pattern using a common syntax, and a regular expression engine figures out how to do the pattern matching for them.
Matching exact strings

The following are special characters in regular expressions: \
( ) [ ] { } + * ? | $ ^ .

To match an exact string that has no special characters, just use the string:

Berkeley, CA 94720

Matches: Berkeley, CA 94720

But if the matched string contains special characters, they must be escaped using a backslash.

\(1\+3\)

Matches: (1+3)
The dot

The . character matches any single character that is not a new line.

Matches: banana

It's typically better to match a more specific range of characters, however...
# Character classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Matches:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[]</td>
<td>Denotes a character class. Matches characters in a set (including ranges of characters like 0-9). Use [^] to match characters outside a set.</td>
<td>[top]</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Matches any character other than the newline character.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\d</td>
<td>Matches any digit character. Equivalent to [0-9]. \D is the complement and refers to all non-digit characters.</td>
<td>\d\d</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\w</td>
<td>Matches any word character. Equivalent to [A-Za-z0-9_]. \W is the complement.</td>
<td>\d\w</td>
<td>4Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\s</td>
<td>Matches any whitespace character: spaces, tabs, or line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| \d\s\w | 9 a |
# Quantifiers

These indicate how many of a character/character class to match.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Matches:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>Matches 0 or more of the previous pattern.</td>
<td>a*</td>
<td>aaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Matches 1 or more of the previous pattern.</td>
<td>lo+l</td>
<td>lool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Matches 0 or 1 of the previous pattern.</td>
<td>lo?ql</td>
<td>lol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{}</td>
<td>Used like (\text{Min, Max}). Matches a quantity between Min and Max of the previous pattern.</td>
<td>a{2,4}</td>
<td>aaaa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Anchors

These don't match an actual character, they indicate the position where the surrounding pattern should be found.

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<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Matches:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>^</td>
<td>Matches the beginning of a string.</td>
<td>^aw+</td>
<td>aww</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>Matches the end of a string.</td>
<td>\w+y$</td>
<td>stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\b</td>
<td>Matches a word boundary, the beginning or end of a word.</td>
<td>\w+e\b</td>
<td>bridge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combining patterns

Patterns $P_1$ and $P_2$ can be combined in various ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Matches:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$P_1P_2$</td>
<td>A match for $P_1$ followed immediately by one for $P_2$.</td>
<td>ab[.,]</td>
<td>ab,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$P_1</td>
<td>P_2$</td>
<td>Matches anything that either $P_1$ or $P_2$ does.</td>
<td>\d+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$(P_1)$</td>
<td>Matches whatever $P_1$ does. Parentheses group, just as in arithmetic expressions.</td>
<td>(&lt;3)+</td>
<td>&lt;3&lt;3&lt;3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regular expressions in Python
Support for regular expressions

Regular expressions are supported natively in many languages and tools.

Languages: Perl, ECMAScript, Java, Python, ..

Tools: Excel/Google Spreadsheets, SQL, BigQuery, VSCode, grep, ...
Raw strings

In normal Python strings, a backslash indicates an escape sequence, like `\n` for new line or `\b` for bell.

```python
>>> print("I have\na newline in me."")
I have
a newline in me
```

But backslash has a special meaning in regular expressions. To make it easy to write regular expressions in Python strings, use raw strings by prefixing the string with an `r`:

```python
pattern = r"\b[ab]+\b"
```
The **re module** provides many helpful functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>re.search(pattern, string)</code></td>
<td>returns a match object representing the first occurrence of pattern within string</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>re.fullmatch(pattern, string)</code></td>
<td>returns a match object, requiring that pattern matches the entirety of string</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>re.match(pattern, string)</code></td>
<td>returns a match object, requiring that string starts with a substring that matches pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>re.findall(pattern, string)</code></td>
<td>returns a list of strings representing all matches of pattern within string, from left to right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>re.sub(pattern, repl, string)</code></td>
<td>substitutes all matches of pattern within string with repl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Match objects

The functions `re.match`, `re.search`, and `re.fullmatch` all take a string containing a regular expression and a string of text. They return either a `Match` object or, if there is no match, `None`.

`re.fullmatch` requires that the pattern matches the entirety of the string:

```python
import re

re.fullmatch(r'-?\d+', '123')  # <re.Match object>
re.fullmatch(r'-?\d+', '123 peeps')  # None
```
Match objects

The functions `re.match`, `re.search`, and `re.fullmatch` all take a string containing a regular expression and a string of text. They return either a `Match` object or, if there is no match, `None`.

`re.fullmatch` requires that the pattern matches the entirety of the string:

```python
import re

re.fullmatch(r'-?\d+', '123')  # <re.Match object>
re.fullmatch(r'-?\d+', '123 peeps')  # None
```

Match objects are treated as true values, so you can use the result as a boolean:

```python
bool(re.fullmatch(r'-?\d+', '123'))  # True
bool(re.fullmatch(r'-?\d+', '123 peeps'))  # False
```
Inspecting a match

`re.search` returns a match object representing the first occurrence of pattern within string.

```python
title = "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"
bool(re.search(r'Bird'))  # True
```
re.search returns a match object representing the first occurrence of pattern within string.

```python
title = "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"
bool(re.search(r'Bird'))  # True
```

Match objects also carry information about what has been matched. The `.group()` method allows you to retrieve it.

```python
x = "This string contains 35 characters."
mat = re.search(r'\d+', x)
mat.group(0)  # 35
```
Match groups

If there are parentheses in a patterns, each of the parenthesized groups will become groups in the match object.

```python
x = "There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound."
mat = re.search(r'\d+ [a-z\s]+ (\d+)', x)
mat.group(0)
mat.group(1)
mat.group(2)
mat.groups()
```
Match groups

If there are parentheses in a patterns, each of the parenthesized groups will become groups in the match object.

```python
x = "There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound."
mat = re.search(r'(^d+)\[a-z\s]+(\d+)\'', x)
mat.group(0)  # '12 pence in a shilling and 20'
mat.group(1)
mat.group(2)
mat.groups()
```
Match groups

If there are parentheses in a patterns, each of the parenthesized groups will become groups in the match object.

```python
x = "There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound."
mat = re.search(r'\d+[a-z ]+(\d+)', x)
mat.group(0)  # '12 pence in a shilling and 20'
mat.group(1)  # 12
mat.group(2)
mat.groups()
```
Match groups

If there are parentheses in a patterns, each of the parenthesized groups will become groups in the match object.

```python
x = "There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound."
mat = re.search(r'\d+[a-z\s]+\d+', x)

mat.group(0)  # '12 pence in a shilling and 20'
mat.group(1)  # 12
mat.group(2)  # 20
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x = "There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound."
mat = re.search(r'\d+\s[a-z]+\s\d+', x)

mat.group(0)    # '12 pence in a shilling and 20'
mat.group(1)    # 12
mat.group(2)    # 20
mat.groups()    # (12, 20)
```
Finding multiple matches

`re.findall()` returns a list of strings representing all matches of pattern within string, from left to right.

```python
locations = "CA 91105, NY 13078, CA 94702"
re.findall(r'\d\d\d', locations)
# ['91105', '13078', '94702']
```
Resolving ambiguity
Ambiguous matches

Regular expressions can match a given string in more than one way. Especially when there are parenthesized groups, this can lead to ambiguity:

```python
mat = re.match(r'wind|window', 'window')
mat.group()

mat = re.match(r'window|wind', 'window')
mat.group()

mat = re.match(r'(wind|window)(.*)shade', 'window shade')
mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(window|wind)(.*)shade', 'window shade')
mat.groups()
```

Python resolves these particular ambiguities in favor of the first option.
Ambiguous matches

Regular expressions can match a given string in more than one way. Especially when there are parenthesized groups, this can lead to ambiguity:

```python
mat = re.match(r'wind|window', 'window')
mat.group()  # 'wind'

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mat.group()  # 'window'

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mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(window|wind)(.*)shade', 'window shade')
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```

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mat.group()  # 'wind'

mat = re.match(r'window|wind', 'window')
mat.group()  # 'window'

mat = re.match(r'(wind|window)(.*)shade', 'window shade')
mat.groups()  # ('wind', 'ow ')

mat = re.match(r'(window|wind)(.*)shade', 'window shade')
mat.groups()
```

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mat = re.match(r'window|wind', 'window')
mat.group() # 'window'

mat = re.match(r'(wind|window)(.*).shade', 'window shade')
mat.groups() # ('wind', 'ow ')

mat = re.match(r'(window|wind)(.*).shade', 'window shade')
mat.groups() # ('window', '')
```

Python resolves these particular ambiguities in favor of the first option.
Ambiguous quantifiers

Likewise, there is ambiguity with *, +, and ?.

```python
mat = re.match(r'(x*)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(x+)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(x?)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(.*)/(.+)', '12/10/2020')
mat.groups()
```

Python chooses to match **greedily**, matching the pattern left-to-right and, when given a choice, matching as much as possible while still allowing the rest of the pattern to match.
Ambiguous quantifiers

Likewise, there is ambiguity with *, +, and ?.

```python
mat = re.match(r'(x*)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()  # ('xxx', '')

mat = re.match(r'(x+)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(x?)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(.*)/(.+)', '12/10/2020')
mat.groups()
```

Python chooses to match greedily, matching the pattern left-to-right and, when given a choice, matching as much as possible while still allowing the rest of the pattern to match.
Ambiguous quantifiers

Likewise, there is ambiguity with *, +, and ?.

```python
mat = re.match(r'(x*)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()  # ('xxx', '')

mat = re.match(r'(x+)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()  # ('xxx', '')

mat = re.match(r'(x?)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()

mat = re.match(r'(.*)/(.+)', '12/10/2020')
mat.groups()
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Python chooses to match greedily, matching the pattern left-to-right and, when given a choice, matching as much as possible while still allowing the rest of the pattern to match.
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mat.groups()  # ('xxx', '')

mat = re.match(r'(x+)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()  # ('xxx', '')

mat = re.match(r'(x?)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()  # ('x', 'xx')

mat = re.match(r'(.*)/(.+)', '12/10/2020')
mat.groups()
```

Python chooses to match greedily, matching the pattern left-to-right and, when given a choice, matching as much as possible while still allowing the rest of the pattern to match.
Ambiguous quantifiers

Likewise, there is ambiguity with *, +, and ?.

```python
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mat.groups()  # ('xxx', '')

mat = re.match(r'(x+)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()  # ('xxx', '')

mat = re.match(r'(x?)(.*)', 'xxx')
mat.groups()  # ('x', 'xx')

mat = re.match(r'(.*)/(.*+)', '12/10/2020')
mat.groups()  # ('12/10', '2020')
```

Python chooses to match **greedily**, matching the pattern left-to-right and, when given a choice, matching as much as possible while still allowing the rest of the pattern to match.
Lazy operators

Sometimes, you don’t want to match as much as possible. The lazy operators `*?`, `+?`, and `??` match only as much as necessary for the whole pattern to match.

```python
mat = re.match(r'(.*)(\d*)', 'I have 5 dollars')
mat.groups() # ('I have 5 dollars', '')
```

```python
mat = re.match(r'(.*?)(\d+)', 'I have 5 dollars')
mat.groups() # ('I have ', '5')
```

```python
mat = re.match(r'(.*?)(\d*)', 'I have 5 dollars')
mat.groups() # ('', '')
```

The ambiguities introduced by `*`, `+`, `?`, and `|` don’t matter if all you care about is whether there is a match!
⚠️ A word of caution ⚠️

Regular expressions can be very useful. However:

- **Very long regular expressions** can be difficult for other programmers to read and modify. See also: **Write-only**
- Since regular expressions are declarative, it's not always clear how efficiently they'll be processed. Some processing can be so time-consuming, it can **take down a server**.
- Regular expressions can't parse everything! **Don't write an HTML parser with regular expressions.**