

LECTURE 11

PDB - THE PYTHON DEBUGGER

MCS 275 Spring 2022

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LECTURE 11: PDB - THE PYTHON DEBUGGER

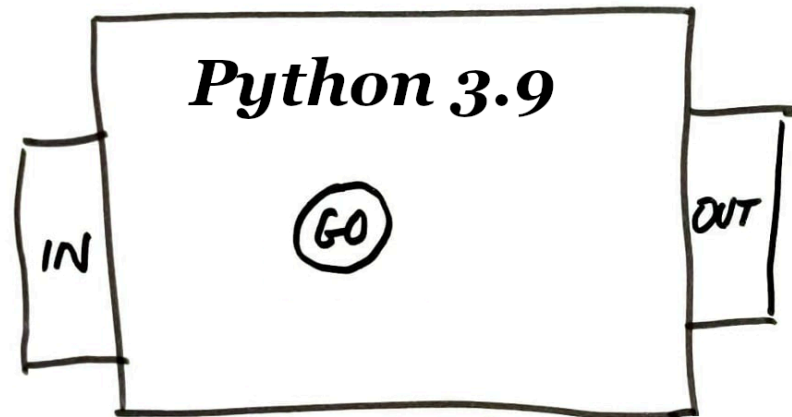
Course bulletins:

- Project 1 due today at 6pm central.
- Homework 4 due Tuesday at Noon central.
- Next week we begin a more theoretical unit (recursion). Check course web page for supplemental reading suggestions.

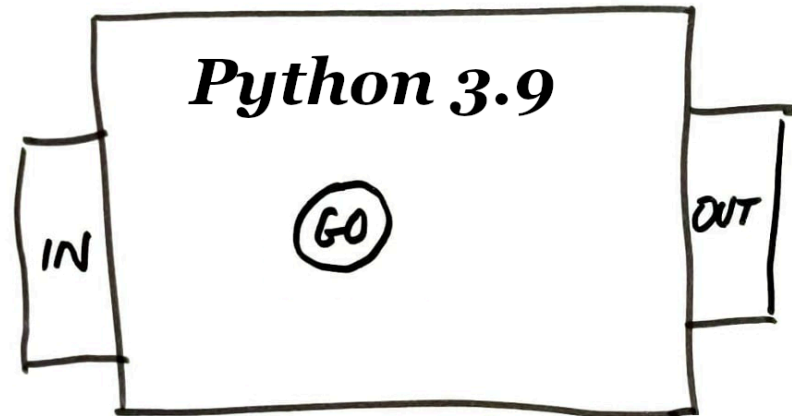
THE IDEA OF A DEBUGGER

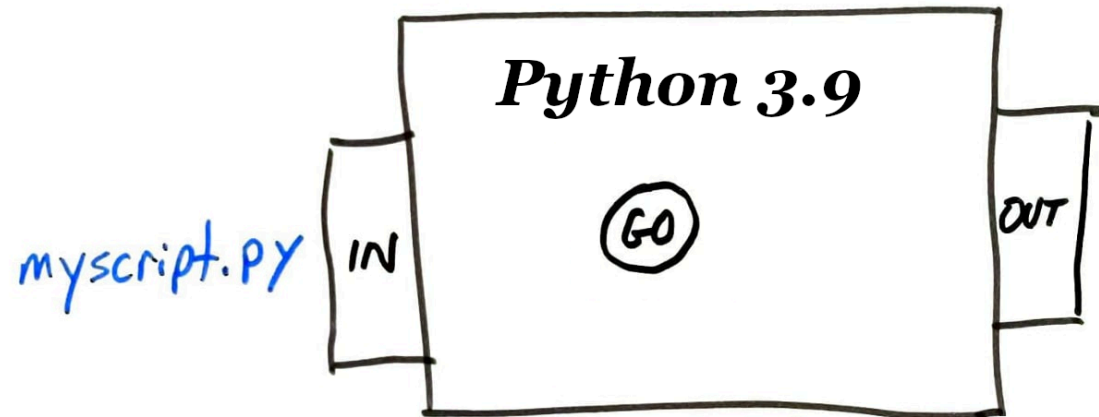
Suppose a Python program has a bug.

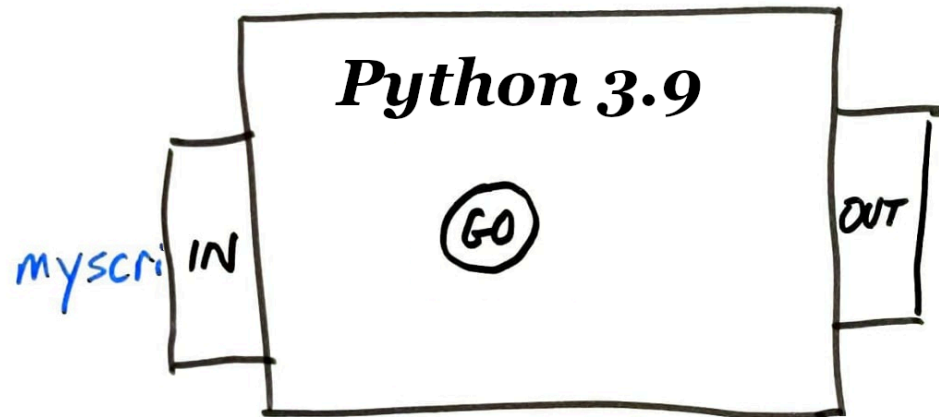
Wouldn't it be nice if you could run the program slowly, monitoring values of variables along the way?

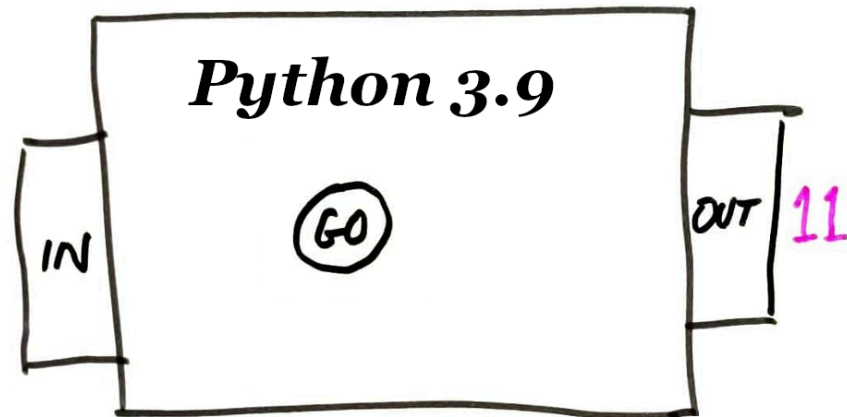


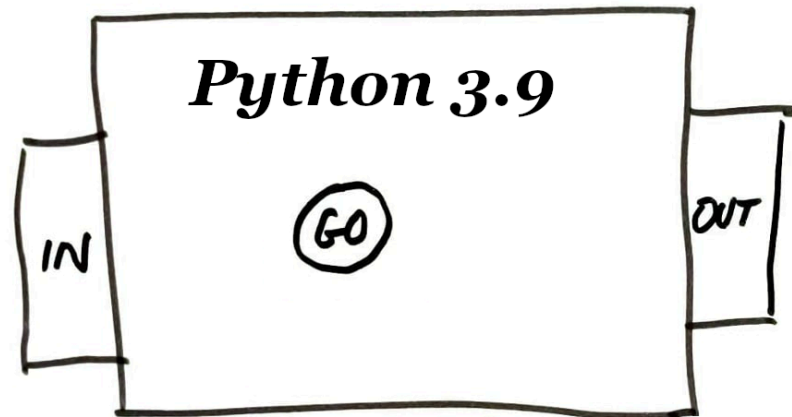
myscript.py





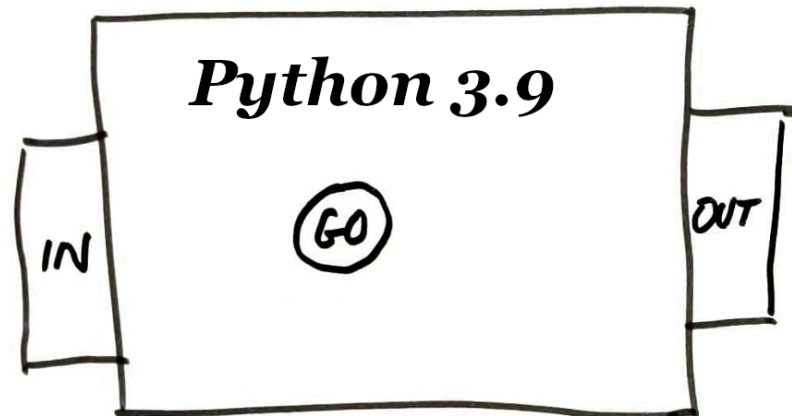


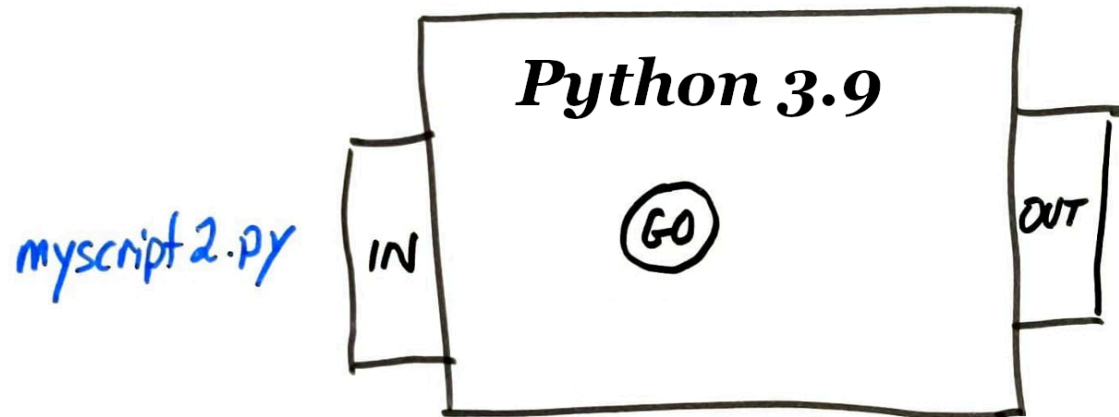


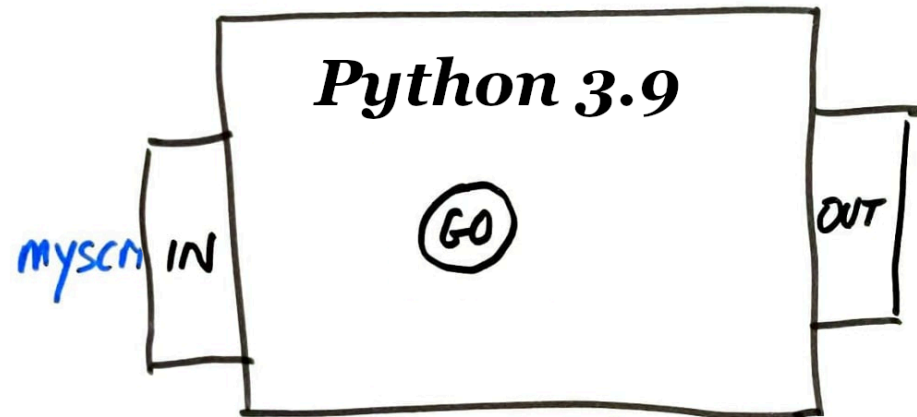


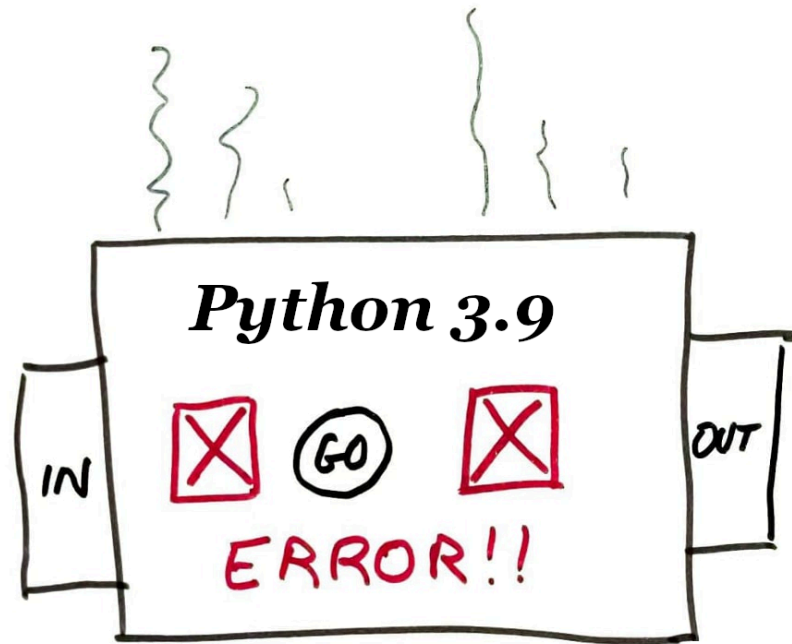
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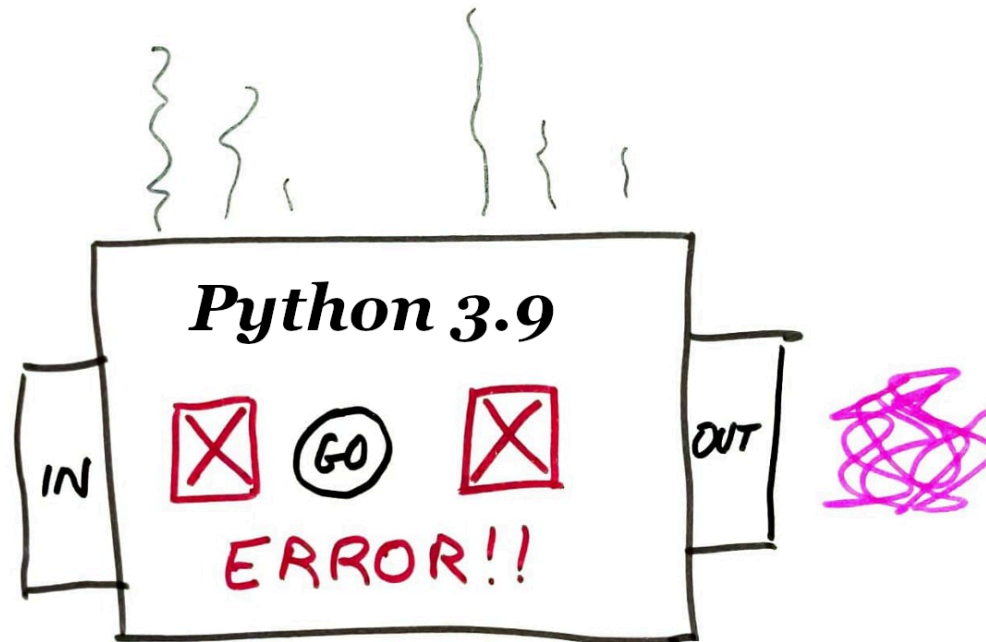
myscript2.py

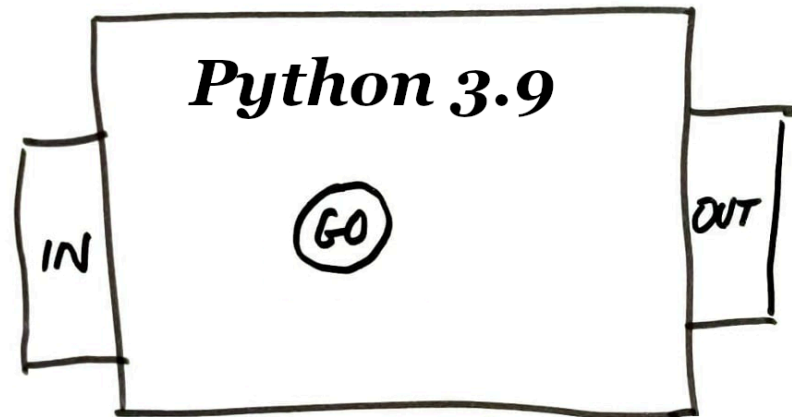




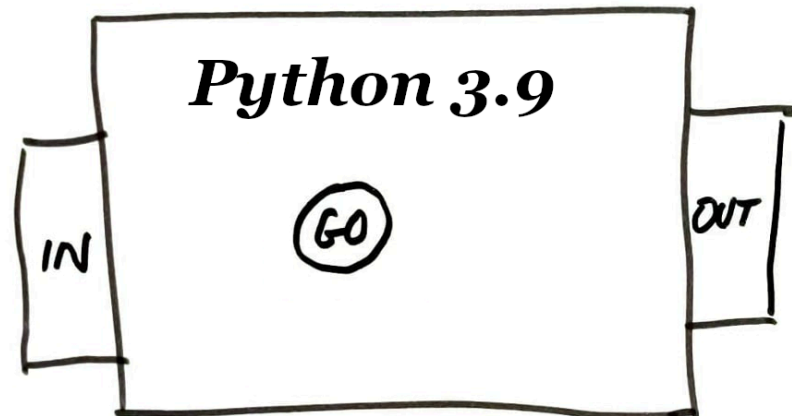


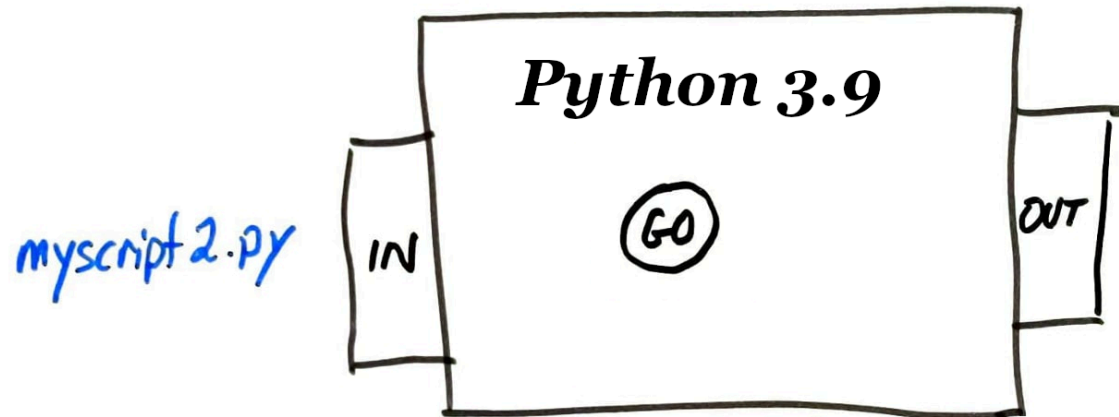


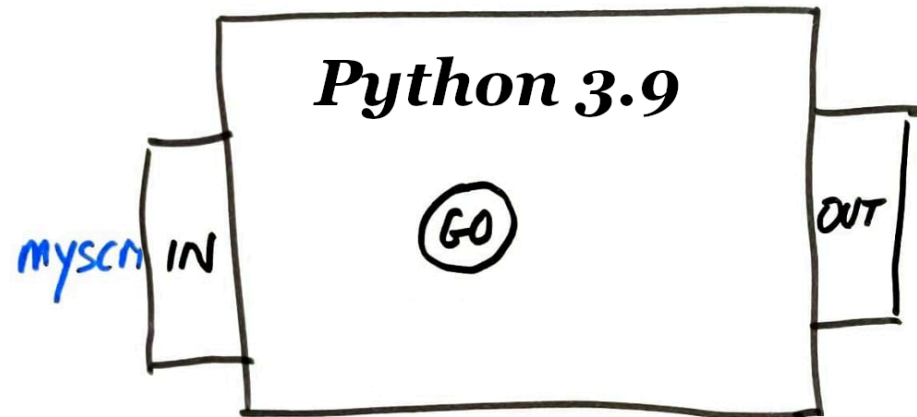


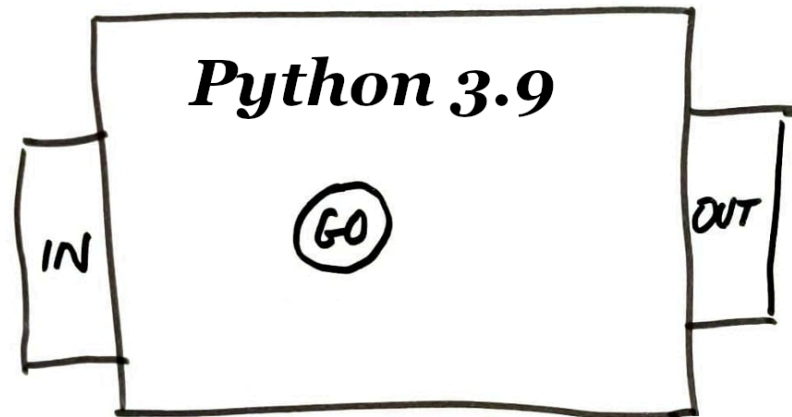


myscript2.py









Python 3.9

Now on line 6 of 48

score is 5

next-char is "o"

Proceed? ☒ YES ☐ NO

IN

OUT

PDB

The built-in Python debugger, called `pdb`, makes this possible. Key features:

- Single-step through a program
- Inspect values of variables
- Run normally until a certain line is reached
- Analyze an exception that is about to end the program.

RUNNING PDB

```
python -m pdb myprogram.py alpha beta 3
```

Runs `myprogram.py` with command line arguments `["alpha", "beta", 3]`, but in the debugger.

The program starts in a **paused state**, and a prompt is shown where we can enter commands (to resume, run a single line, show values of variables, etc.)

PDB BASICS

Running the program:

- **c** or **continue** -- Start or continue running the program, i.e. "unpause".
- **s** or **step** -- Start execution but stop as soon as possible. If a function is called, move to the first line of that function.
- **n** or **next** -- Start execution and stop when the next line of the current function is reached. (If the current line calls other functions, wait for them to return.)
- **r** or **return** -- Start execution and stop when the current function returns.

Inspecting the situation:

- **l** or **list** -- Show a passage of source code that includes the current line.
- **ll** -- Show the entire contents of the file containing the current line.
- **pp** `EXPR` -- Evaluate `EXPR` and display the result nicely ("pretty print")
- **display** `EXPR` -- Every time execution is paused, show the value of `EXPR` if it has changed.

BREAKPOINTS

Rather than single-stepping, it is often helpful to keep running until a certain part of the code is reached.

A place where execution is supposed to stop and return control to the debugger is a **breakpoint**.

- **b** FILE:LINE_NUM -- Set breakpoint by line.
- **b** FUNCTION_NAME -- Set a breakpoint by function name.
- **c1** -- Clear all breakpoints.

POST MORTEM

If an uncaught exception occurs when a program is running in `pdb`, the debugger pauses at the moment of the exception to let you investigate.

This is called a "post mortem" (after death) investigation of the program. You can't continue or step, but you can examine the values of variables, etc.

MOVING AROUND THE TRACEBACK

What if `f()` calls `g()`, and you are paused inside `g` but want to know the value of a local variable of `f`?

- **u** or **up** -- Move one step up the traceback, to the function which called this one.
- **d** or **down** -- Move one step down the traceback, to the function which called this one.
- **w** or **where** -- Show the current traceback.

PROFILING

Measuring the amount of time various parts of a program take is called **profiling**.

Usually you should focus on correctness first, then profile before considering optimization (changing code to make it faster).

REFERENCES

- pdb and cProfiler are not discussed in any depth in the optional texts.
- [The official pdb documentation](#)
- [The official cProfiler documentation](#)
- [This Tutorial on the Python debugger by Lisa Tagliaferri at DigitalOcean](#) is nice.

REVISION HISTORY

- 2022-02-04 Initial publication

