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Computational Structures in Data Science

Recursion

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Announcements

- Maps is out
  - Checkpoint 1 is due tonight. It's a few short functions
  - No slip days for the check point, but slip days for the rest of the project.
- Midterm:
  - Thursday 3/11
  - Includes recursion (today and Friday)

Computing In The News

- AI Can Write a Passing College Paper in 20 Minutes
  ZDNet Greg Nichols February 24, 2021

Researchers at Education Reference Desk (EduRef), a resource for current and prospective students, found that an artificial intelligence (AI) tool can write a college term paper in three to 20 minutes and achieve a passing grade. Humans, in contrast, took three days on average to complete the same assignment. The researchers had a panel of professors grade anonymous submissions to writing prompts from recent graduates and undergraduate-level writers and Open AI's GPT-3, a deep learning language prediction model. The professors gave GPT-3 an average grade of "C" in four subjects, and it failed just one assignment. Said the researchers, "Even without being augmented by human interference, GPT-3's assignments received more or less the same feedback as the human writers."

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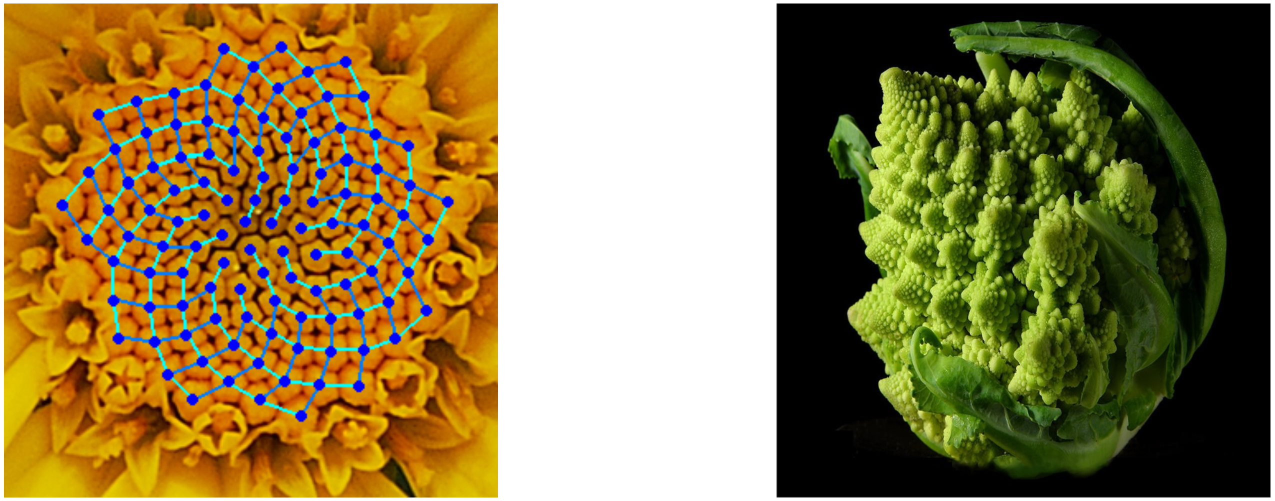
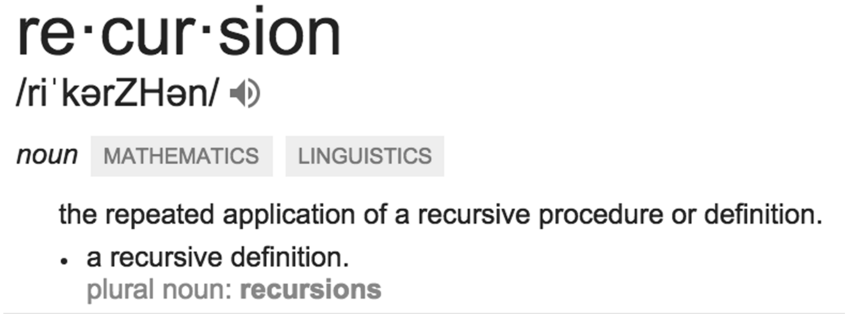
Why Recursion?

- Recursive structures exist (sometimes hidden) in nature and therefore in data!
- It’s mentally and sometimes computationally more efficient to process recursive structures using recursion.
- Sometimes, the recursive definition is easier to understand or write, even if it is computationally slower.



Today: Recursion



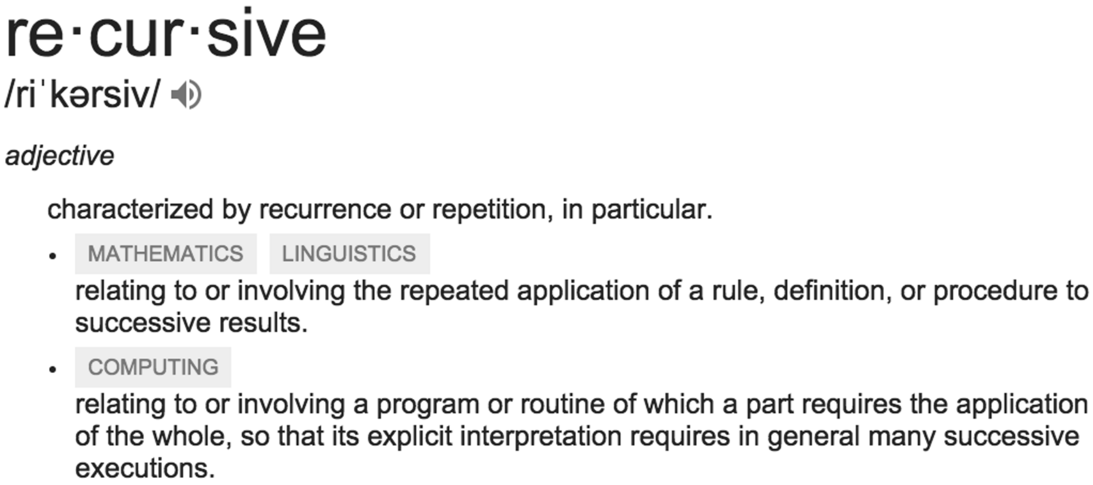
re·cur·sion

/riˈkərZHən/

noun MATHEMATICS LINGUISTICS

the repeated application of a recursive procedure or definition.

- a recursive definition.
  plural noun: **recursions**



re·cur·sive

/riˈkərsiv/

adjective

characterized by recurrence or repetition, in particular.

- MATHEMATICS LINGUISTICS
  relating to or involving the repeated application of a rule, definition, or procedure to successive results.
- COMPUTING
  relating to or involving a program or routine of which a part requires the application of the whole, so that its explicit interpretation requires in general many successive executions.

- Recursive function calls itself, directly or indirectly

Demo: Vee

- run 11-recursion.py
- The file will open an interpreter.
- Use the following keys to play with the demo
  - Space to draw
  - C to Clear
  - Up to add ″vee″ to the functions list
  - Down to remove the ″vee″ functions from the list.

Demo: Countdown

```
def countdown(n):
    if n == 0:
        print('Blastoff!')
    else:
        print(n)
        countdown(n - 1)
```

The Recursive Process

- Recursive solutions involve two major parts:
  - Base case(s), the problem is simple enough to be solved directly
  - Recursive case(s). A recursive case has three components:
    - Divide the problem into one or more simpler or smaller parts
    - Invoke the function (recursively) on each part, and
    - Combine the solutions of the parts into a solution for the problem.

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Learning Objectives

- Compare Recursion and Iteration to each other
  - Translate some simple functions from one method to another
- Write a recursive function
  - Understand the base case and a recursive case

Iteration vs Recursion: Sum Numbers

For loop:

```
def sum(n):
    s=0
    for i in range(0,n+1):
        s=s+i
    return s
```

Iteration vs Recursion: Sum Numbers

While loop:

```
def sum(n):
    s=0
    i=0
    while i<n:
        i=i+1
        s=s+i
    return s
```

Iteration vs Recursion: Sum Numbers

Recursion:

```
def sum(n):
    if n == 0:
        return 0
    return n+sum(n-1)
```

Iteration vs Recursion: Cheating!

Sometimes it’s best to just use a formula! But that’s not always the point. ☺

```
def sum(n):
    return (n * (n + 1)) / 2
```

The Recursive Process

- Recursive solutions involve two major parts:
  - Base case(s), the problem is simple enough to be solved directly
  - Recursive case(s). A recursive case has three components:
    - Divide the problem into one or more simpler or smaller parts
    - Invoke the function (recursively) on each part, and
    - Combine the solutions of the parts into a solution for the problem.

Recall: Iteration

1. Initialize the “base” case of no iterations

2. Starting value

3. Ending value

4. New loop variable value

```
def sum_of_squares(n):
    accum = 0
    for i in range(1,n+1):
        accum = accum + i*i
    return accum
```

Recursion Key concepts – by example

1. Test for simple “base” case

2. Solution in simple “base” case

```
def sum_of_squares(n):
    if n < 1:
        return 0
    else:
        return sum_of_squares(n-1) + n**2
```

3. Assume recusive solution to simpler problem

4. ”Combine” the simpler part of the solution, with the recursive case

In words

- The sum of no numbers is zero
- The sum of 1^2 through n^2 is the
  - sum of 1^2 through $(n-1)^2$
  - plus n^2

```
def sum_of_squares(n):
    if n < 1:
        return 0
    else:
        return sum_of_squares(n-1) + n**2
```

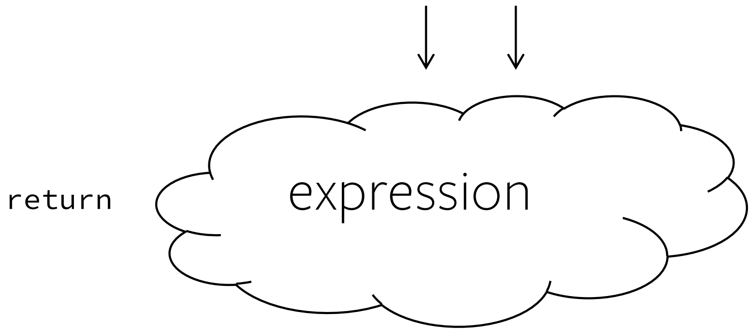
Why does it work

```
sum_of_squares(3)

# sum_of_squares(3) => sum_of_squares(2) + 3**2
#                   => sum_of_squares(1) + 2**2 + 3**2
#                   => sum_of_squares(0) + 1**2 + 2**2 + 3**2
#                   => 0 + 1**2 + 2**2 + 3**2 = 14
```

Review: Functions

`def` <function name> `(`<argument list>`) :`



`return` expression

```
def concat(str1, str2):
   return str1+str2;

concat(“Hello”,”World”)
```

- Generalizes an expression or set of statements to apply to lots of instances of the problem
- A function should *do one thing well*

How does it work?

- Each recursive call gets its own local variables
  - Just like any other function call
- Computes its result (possibly using additional calls)
  - Just like any other function call
- Returns its result and returns control to its caller
  - Just like any other function call
- The function that is called happens to be itself
  - Called on a simpler problem
  - Eventually stops on the simple base case

Questions

- In what order do we sum the squares ?
- How does this compare to iterative approach ?

```
def sum_of_squares(n):
    accum = 0
    for i in range(1,n+1):
        accum = accum + i*i
    return accum
```

```
def sum_of_squares(n):
    if n < 1:
        return 0
    else:
        return sum_of_squares(n-1) + n**2
```

```
def sum_of_squares(n):
    if n < 1:
        return 0
    else:
        return n**2 + sum_of_squares(n-1)
```

Trust …

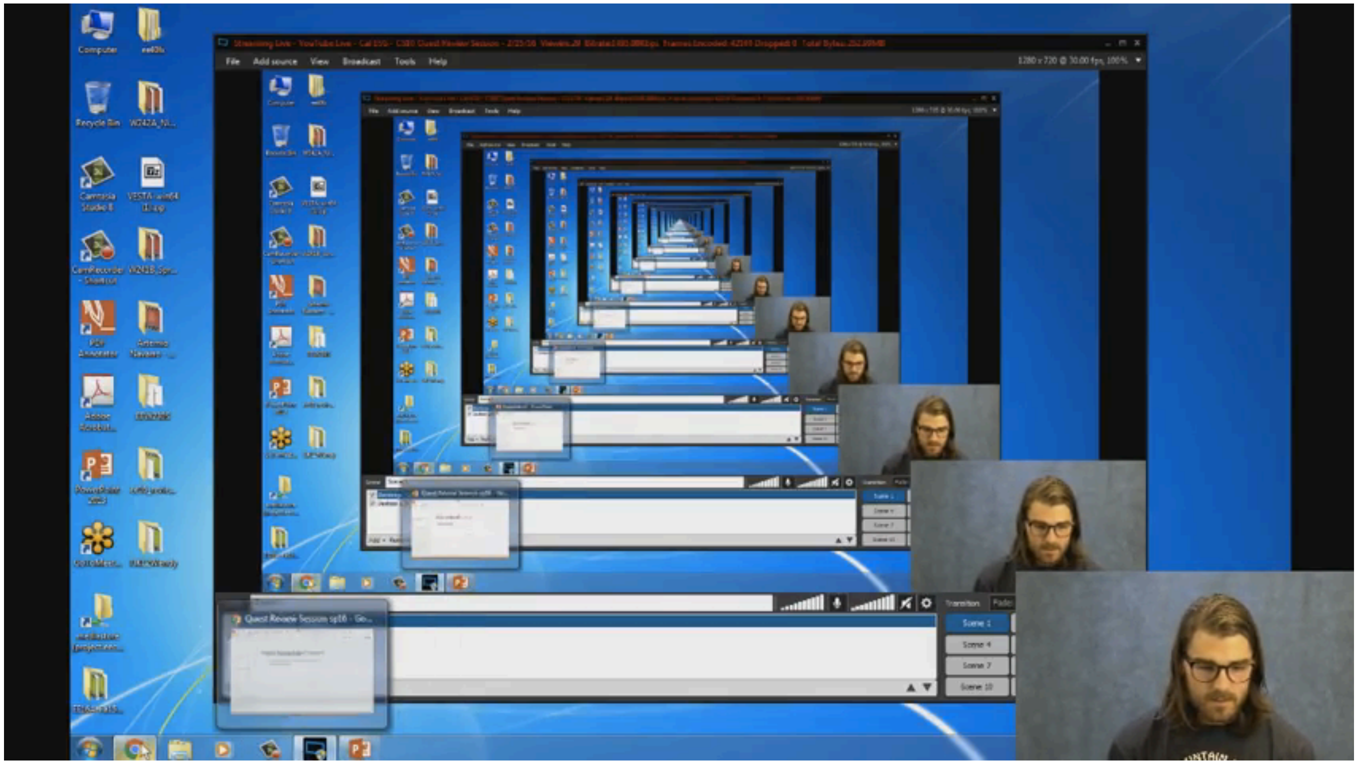
- The recursive “leap of faith” works as long as we hit the base case eventually

What happens if we don’t?

Why Recursion?

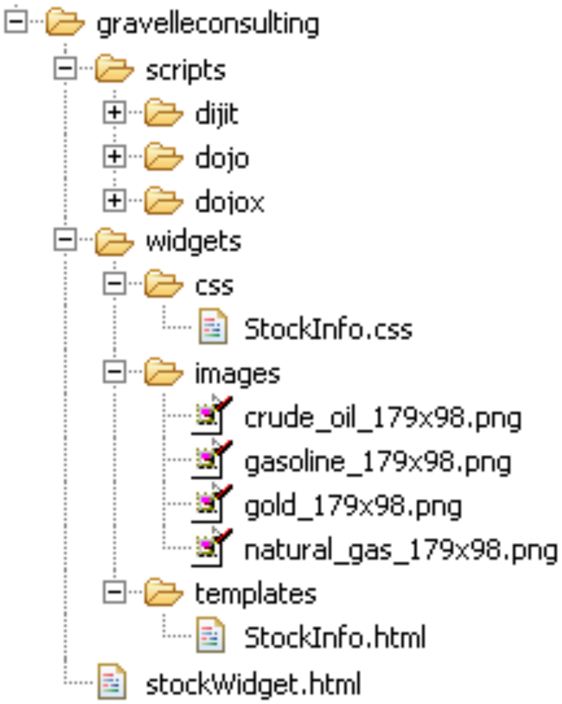
- “After Abstraction, Recursion is probably the 2nd biggest idea in this course”
- “It’s tremendously useful when the problem is self-similar”
- “It’s no more powerful than iteration, but often leads to more concise & better code”
- “It’s more ‘mathematical’”
- “It embodies the beauty and joy of computing”
- …

Recursion (unwanted)



Example I

List all items on your hard disk



- gravelleconsulting
  - scripts
    - dijit
    - dojo
    - dojox
  - widgets
    - css
      - StockInfo.css
    - images
      - crude_oil_179x98.png
      - gasoline_179x98.png
      - gold_179x98.png
      - natural_gas_179x98.png
    - templates
      - StockInfo.html
  - stockWidget.html

- Files
- Folders contain
  - Files
  - Folders

Recursion!

Another Example

indexing an element of a sequence

```
def first(s):
    """Return the first element in a sequence."""
    return s[0]
def rest(s):
    """Return all elements in a sequence after the first"""
    return s[1:]
```

Slicing a sequence of elements

```
def min_r(s):
    “””Return minimum value in a sequence.”””
    if
```

Base Case

```
    else:
```

Recursive Case

- Recursion over sequence length, rather than number magnitude

Why Recursion? More Reasons

- Recursive structures exist (sometimes hidden) in nature and therefore in data!
- It's mentally and sometimes computationally more efficient to process recursive structures using recursion.