

Unit testing using Python nose

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Scientific code must not just produce nice looking output, but actually be correct.

metarabbit.wordpress.com

Some recent code-related scientific catastrophes:

- Geoffrey Chang
- Abortion reduces crime? maybe not so much once you fix the bug
- Rogoff's "Growth in a Time of Debt" paper is a famous example (even if the bug itself is only a small part of the counter-argument)
- East Anglia "Climategate"

Why do things go wrong?

- ① Your code is correct, but input files are wrong/missing/, the network goes down ...
- ② Your code is buggy.

Never fail silently!

- The worst thing is to fail silently.
- Fail loudly and clearly

(This is partially why Unix tradition is to produce no output when things go well)

Defensive programming means writing code that will catch bugs early.

```
def stddev(values):  
    '''  
    S = stddev(values)  
  
    Compute standard deviation  
    '''  
    assert len(values) > 0, 'stddev: got empty list.'  
    ...
```

Assertions

```
def stddev(values):  
    '''  
    S = stddev(values)  
  
    Compute standard deviation  
    '''  
    if len(values) <= 0:  
        raise AssertionError(  
            'stddev: got empty list.')
```

...

In computer programming, a precondition is a condition or predicate that must always be true just prior to the execution of some section of code.

(Wikipedia)

Other Languages

- **C/C++** `#include <assert.h>`
- **Java** `assert` pre-condition
- **Matlab** `assert ()` (in newer versions)
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Assertions Are Not Error Handling!

- Error handling protects against outside events; assertions protect against programmer mistakes.
- Assertions **should never** be false.

- ① pre-conditions.
- ② post-conditions.
- ③ invariants.

Pre-condition

What must be true before calling a function.

Post-condition

What is true after calling a function.

Do you test your code?

```
def test_stddev_const():  
    assert stddev([1]*100) < 1e-3  
  
def test_stddev_positive():  
    assert stddev(range(20)) > 0.
```

Nose software testing framework:

- Tests are named `test_something`.
- Conditions are asserted.

Software Testing Philosophies

- ① Test everything. Test it twice.
- ② Write tests first.
- ③ Regression testing.

Make sure bugs only appear once!

Practical Session: some preliminaries

```
statistics.py
```

```
def stddev(xs):  
    . . .
```

```
test_statistics.py
```

```
def test_stddev_const():  
    assert stddev([1]*100) < 1e-3  
  
def test_stddev_positive():  
    assert stddev(range(20)) > 0.
```

Practical Session: some preliminaries

```
statistics.py
```

```
def stddev(xs):  
    . . .
```

```
test_statistics.py
```

```
import statistics  
def test_stddev_const():  
    assert statistics.stddev([1]*100) < 1e-3  
  
def test_stddev_positive():  
    assert statistics.stddev(range(20)) > 0.
```

Practical: Python III & Unit testing

- ① You can either start from scratch or check the files I give you (or any combination of both).
- ② Goal is to write code to do a simple task & test it.

- 1 Download files from <https://github.com/luispedro/2014-04-04-python>
- 2 There is a data file (data.txt)
- 3 See the code in main.py, which loads it.
- 4 Write a function average in a file called robust.py, which computes the average of a sequence of numbers, whilst ignoring the maximum and minimum.
- 5 Write tests for robust.average.
- 6 (If you have the time, you can look at plots.py)