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What is Python?

An interpreted language with a comedy-series name.

The official Python FAQ opens with a clear definition: "Python is an interpreted, interactive, object-oriented programming language." It incorporates modules, exceptions, dynamic typing, very high level dynamic data types, and classes, and it also supports procedural and functional programming.[1]

Why the name?

When Guido van Rossum began implementing Python, he was also reading the published scripts from "Monty Python's Flying Circus", a BBC comedy series from the 1970s. He thought he needed a name that was short, unique, and slightly mysterious, so he decided to call the language Python.[2]

Do you have to like the Circus? The official answer is: "No, but it helps. :)"[2]

Why it suits beginners

Is Python a good language for beginning programmers? The FAQ says yes. It has a very simple and consistent syntax and a large standard library, and, most importantly, using it in a beginning course lets students concentrate on skills such as problem decomposition and data type design.[3]

It is also portable: it runs on many Unix variants including Linux and macOS, and on Windows.[1]

What it is good for

"Python is a high-level general-purpose programming language that can be applied to many different classes of problems." It comes with a large standard library covering string processing, internet protocols, software engineering and operating system interfaces.[4]

Python 2 and Python 3

"Python 3.x is the recommended version and supported by most widely used libraries. Python 2.x is not maintained anymore."[5]

Versions are numbered A.B.C (or A.B): A is the major version, B the minor version, and C the micro, or bugfix, version.[5]

python.org is just as plain about the older line: 1 January 2020 was the day they sunset Python 2. They will not improve it anymore after that day, even if someone finds a security problem in it. You should upgrade to Python 3 as soon as you can.[6]

Where indentation comes from

In the same FAQ, Guido van Rossum writes that many Python features, including the use of indentation for statement grouping and very-high-level data types, have their origin in the ABC group at CWI, although the details are all different in Python.[5]

How often a new Python appears

As of version 3.9, Python will have a new feature release every 12 months (PEP 602). Bugfix releases, indicated by a third component of the version number, are managed for stability.[5]

Quick quiz

1. Is Python named after the snake, or after a BBC comedy series?
2. Which official version is recommended today: Python 2 or Python 3?
3. After 1 January 2020, is Python 2 still improved if a security problem is found?

Answers. 1. After "Monty Python's Flying Circus".[2] 2. Python 3.x.[5] 3. No — it is not improved after that day, even for a security problem.[6]

Sources, checked 17 November 2026, against the Python 3.15.2 docs and python.org. 1. FAQ: What is Python? https://docs.python.org/3/faq/general.html#what-is-python 2. FAQ: Why is it called Python? https://docs.python.org/3/faq/general.html#why-is-it-called-python 3. FAQ: beginning programmers https://docs.python.org/3/faq/general.html#is-python-a-good-language-for-beginning-programmers 4. FAQ: What is Python good for? https://docs.python.org/3/faq/general.html#what-is-python-good-for 5. General Python FAQ https://docs.python.org/3/faq/general.html 6. Sunsetting Python 2 https://www.python.org/doc/sunset-python-2/

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